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THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish
Bird News

MARCH 1991 No. 21
ISSN 0268-3199

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and Sylvia Laing

How important are our birds?

Red data books produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the International Council for Bird Preservation have drawn attention to birds, and other forms of wildlife, threatened by extinction in the world. Many are in distant places such as tropical forests. However do we in Britain have populations of birds that are of more than local importance? The publication of a new book, Red data birds in Britain, compiled by the RSPB and NCC, allows us to put our birds into proper perspective.

The British avifauna

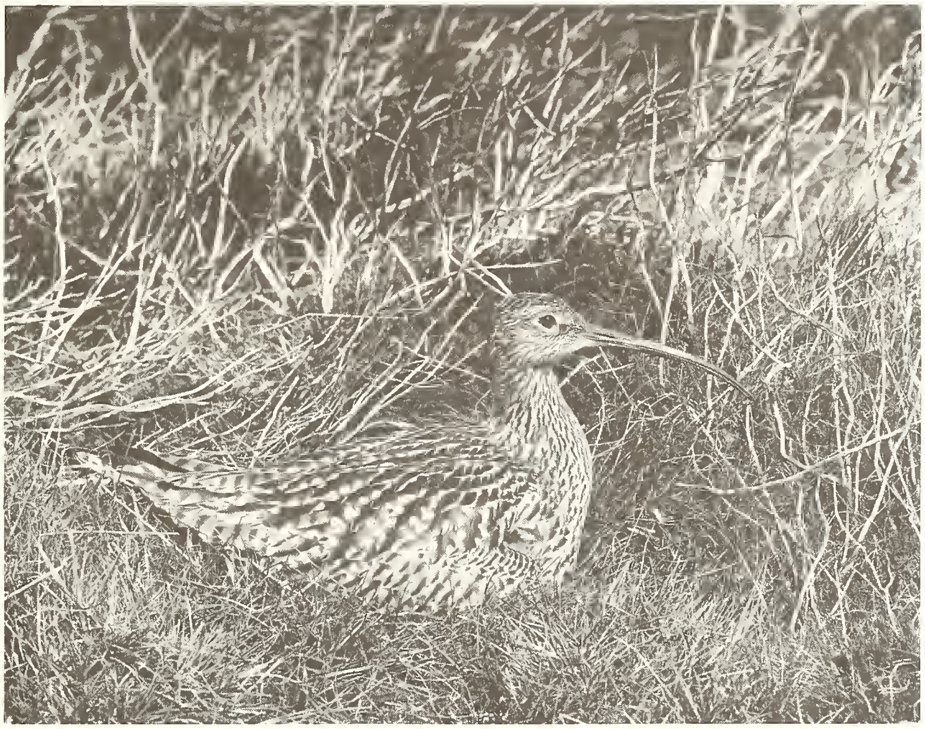
Over 520 bird species have been recorded in Britain (excluding Ireland and the Channel Islands) during this century and, of these, 210 nest every year and 27 more have nested at least once. Apart from the regular breeders, 54 species are common passage migrants or winter visitors. The rest are rare passage migrants or vagrants, many of which have been recorded only on a small number of occasions.

Viewed on a European scale, Britain has a rather restricted breeding land-bird fauna. Many of our breeding land birds have a wide continental distribution and occur in greater numbers elsewhere. Two features of Britain's breeding birds stand out as special. First is the wealth of north-west Atlantic seabirds which breed from Iceland to Britain, Ireland and the coasts of Scandinavia and the Russian arctic. Second is the assemblage of upland birds whose closest affinities are with the tundra regions but which show some important differences from Scandinavian bird communities.

In the winter, our mild oceanic climate attracts many wildfowl and waders which breed to the north, both east and west. Many of these species migrate no further than they have to from their breeding grounds, and Britain provides an attractive wintering area. Our long coastline provides abundant habitat, especially estuaries, suitable for northern breeding waders to pass the winter. High proportions of some wader and wildfowl populations winter or make migration stages in Britain.

Criteria for selection

Species have been selected for inclusion on the basis of five criteria. In practice, the data on species abundance or trends vary in quality both from species to species and regionally over a single species' range. Future research should improve our information. The different criteria vary in their objectivity and cannot be compared directly to each other. Judging the case for each species independently for each category should ensure that the species included are valid candidates, even though their claims for inclusion vary in strength. Species introduced beyond their natural ranges were not included. Some, such as Canada Goose, would be included by virtue of a high proportion of the European breeding population being in Britain. A notable candidate would have been the Mandarin Duck which is a Red Data Book species in its native range which gives the feral British population an unusual claim to importance. A total of 117 species are covered and a further 30 listed as possible additions that also need careful monitoring.



Curlew *David Gowans*
This species occurs in internationally important numbers in Britain with many of the birds in Scotland.

International significance

Conservation is an international concern. We have special responsibility to maintain species for which Britain supports numbers of international importance. For a few species, this can be judged on a world scale which would be the ideal yardstick. For most this is not yet realistic because of the lack of adequate census data, especially outside Britain and western Europe.

The definition of the area for which the British population is important presents difficulties. If we cannot compare our populations to the world populaations, where do we draw our boundary? Europe seems appropriate, but should we consider the whole continent, just the EEC, or some other part. The biogeographical view is that a north-west European flyway clearly exists for geese and waders, with little interchange across central Europe between this and other, eastern populations. The book takes a similar view for songbirds and seabirds, setting a national grouping of the western European countries from Scandinavia to Iberia, including Iceland.

A threshold British population of 20% of this north-west European wintering or breeding population has been set for a species inclusion. Judgement has had to be made on the inclusion or otherwise of a small number of marginal species and where census data are poor.

The 43 species in this most important group are shown in the table. It is noteworthy how many occur in numbers in Scotland.

Scarcity as British breeders

Scarcity is important because it indicates the susceptibility of a population to loss of range or numbers. In some cases, it also indicates an association with scarce and thus valuable habitats. All species with recent breeding records in Britain but numbers below 300 pairs have been included. This is the cut-off point usually used by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Species with very variable populations (eg, Dartford Warbler) have been included if low counts in the last 20 years have been below this threshold.

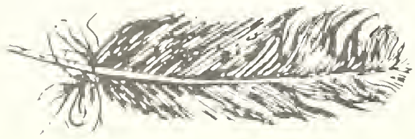
The ranges of breeding birds are in constant flux, so that it is no surprise that oddities arrive and breed sporadically and that some species on the edges of their range are very scarce. Amongst these, it is difficult to judge the importance of conservation. Potential new colonists and species with smaller ranges or numbers than could naturally be expected to occur (eg, Purple Sandpiper or Little Gull) deserve support in the vulnerable phase of scarcity. By comparison, accidentals are of little more than curiosity value. Since there is no reliable way of making a separation within this range of scarce breeding birds, the book includes them all, except Spotted Sandpiper in 1975, an event which is unlikely to recur. The book stresses the species are not of highest importance to nature conservation.

Declining breeding numbers

Populations fluctuate. Long-term downward trends may indicate the impact of man and are potentially reversible. The case of the Grey Partridge is a good example of a declining species for which the causes are well understood. The condition for inclusion in this category has arbitrarily been set as a persistent decline of more than 50% in the last 25 years. Sudden crashes due to cold winters or similar natural causes have been excluded. Thus Whitethroats declined in numbers by about 75% between 1968 and 1969 and have not since recovered. However, they are not included as this sharp change is believed to have been due to drought in the Sahel. It proved very difficult to assign this category because of lack of adequate data for several species which might be eligible. These species deserve better monitoring so as to be given better attention if needed.

Restricted distribution in vulnerable sites or habitats

Populations of some species are believed to be especially vulnerable. In some cases, the species live in rare and vulnerable habitats: for Dartford Warbler or Bearded Tit further loss of heaths or reed-beds would be disastrous. Others, especially seabirds, breed in colonies. Wildfowl and waders winter in concentrations at rather few sites. Any adverse impact on such sites could hve a disproportionate impact on bird numbers.



Internationally important bird populations in Britain

	B	*NB*
Red-throated Diver	*	*
Black-throated Diver		*
Great Northern Diver		*
Manx Shearwater	*	
Storm Petrel	*	
Leach's Petrel	*	
Gannet	*	
Bewick's Swan		*
Whooper Swan		*
Pink-footed Goose		*
White-fronted Goose ssp		*
Greylag Goose		*
Barnacle Goose		*
Brent Goose		*
Shelduck		*
Wigeon		*
Gadwall		*
Teal		*
Pintail		*
Pochard		*
Golden Eagle	*	
Peregrine	*	
Red Grouse	*	
Oystercatcher		*
Ringed Plover		*
Golden Plover		*
Grey Plover		*
Knot		*
Sanderling		*
Dunlin		*
Bar-tailed Godwit		*
Curlew	*	*
Redshank		*
Turnstone		*
Great Skua	*	
Sandwich Tern	*	
Roseate Tern	*	
Arctic Tern	*	
Little Tern	*	
Guillemot	*	
Razorbill	*	
Twite	*	*
Scottish Crossbill	*	

B = At least 20% of the N.W. European breeding population
NB = At least 20% of the N.W European non-breeding population

Species of special concern

In eight cases texts were prepared for species which were expected to qualify for inclusion but which did not do so. In one case (Dotterel) this was because of a sudden increase in numbers. Until it is known whether this increase is real or the result of improved survey data. It was thought better to keep Dotterel in. The other special cases (Black Grouse, Merlin, Greenshank, Whimbrel, Barn Owl and Nightjar) may well have qualified on the grounds of declining range and numbers if only there were adequate data to show it. The species are potentially at risk and merit future research.

How safe are our birds?

On the whole, bird conservation in Britain in the last fifty years has been effective. Britain has lost one regular breeding species (Kentish Plover) and seems about to lose another two (Red-backed Shrike and Wryneck). Several species have recolonized after earlier extinction (eg, Osprey, Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit and, hopefully, White-tailed Eagle if its re-introduction is successful). There have also been new colonists of both southern (eg, Collared Dove and Cetti's Warbler) and northern (eg, Wood Sandpiper and Redwing) origins. A crisis of pesticide contamination was averted, possibly just in time, and there are now thriving populations of Golden Eagles and Peregrines.

There is a more worrying aspect. Birds with exacting habitat requirements can be held from the brink of national extinction on a small number of reserves (for instance Avocet, Bittern and Red-necked Phalarope). There are many species which are vulnerable to the impact of man and which have shown a reduction in range and numbers. The final and national loss of species in Britain has so far been limited. The same cannot be said regionally. The maintenance of a natural geographical range of individual birds is important to the people who support nature conservation. The species described in this book as suffering range reduction could eventually risk national extinction. More immediately they mean a reduction in the quality of life for people who care about their natural environment.

Bar-tailed Godwit *David Mitchell*

***Red data birds in Britain** is published by T & A D Poyser at £18. It is undoubtedly an important book that will become a standard reference work. It is therefore regrettable that it contains so many spelling and other trivial errors; not what one expects from a Poyser publication. It has been edited by a committee of five who seem to have taken over from at least three predecessors. In addition several chapters and sections have been contributed by specialists. It is not clear why some birds have been given consultants while others have not. The references point to the uneven treatment that has resulted. Is the Seafarer book, published in 1974 (though wrongly attributed to 1977 at one point), the only relevant reference for Leach's Petrel? Storm Petrel, a species where Britain may hold 30% of the world population, receives three references and Curlew, of international importance in both breeding and non breeding seasons, gets two. By contrast Black Grouse gets 11, of which five are from the work of one of the consultants, and Nightjar has 15. There is some coverage of the habitats that hold important birds but fuller discussion is needed of the value of semi natural habitat and the extent to which some of the bird populations described are themselves at man induced levels.*

Stan da Prato

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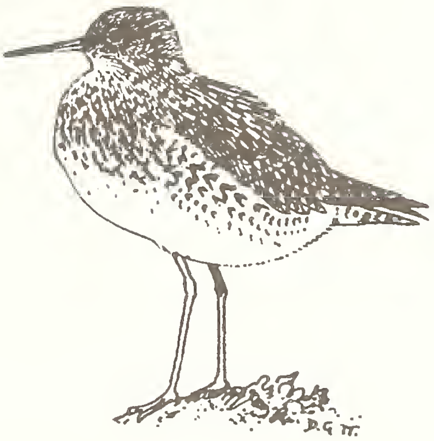
The Inner Tay estuary: the case for a local nature reserve

The Tay Estuary is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and covers an area of approximately 5400 hectares. Of this 410 hectares are reedbeds, the majority of which are located along the northern bank between Cairnie Pier near Glencarse to Invergowrie the rest of the area is the river itself and consists of tidal mudflats and sandbanks.

In 1974, after a gap of 30 years, reeds were once again harvested by the Reedways Company with the approval of the NCC. Since then harvesting has increased; the approximate area harvested is 142 hectares and likely to increase to 160 hectares in the future. If harvesting is carried out sympathetically it can greatly increase the numbers and variety of birds using the reedbeds for breeding or roosting during migration. Left to their own devices the reedbeds will eventually become scrubby areas but careful harvesting will prolong the life of the reedbeds and benefit conservation. Beyond the reeds the bank is wooded for much of its length and provides suitable nesting habitat for a number of species including Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Tawny Owl, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers and the lucky observer may see the occasional Hawfinch.

The area is extremely rich in birdlife and attracts large numbers of breeding birds, particularly Sedge Warblers, possibly in excess of 1000 pairs, Reed Buntings and perhaps 100 pairs of the elusive Water Rail which is 90% of the known breeding population in Tayside. Shelduck also breed along the north bank taking their young down to the mud flats soon after hatching. Harvested areas of the reedbeds provide suitable nesting places for waders such as Snipe, Redshank, Lapwing and Curlew.



Redshank *David Mitchell*

During late summer the reeds are an important roosting area for hirundines, mainly Sand Martins and Swallows. On a suitable evening the number of hirundines steadily increases until at times there can be in excess of 150,000 birds in the air. These birds are attracted to the area by the high concentrations of insects to be found, a good source of food to enable birds to build up their reserves in preparation for migration. Large numbers of warblers also use the reeds as a staging post on migration and recently the Tay Ringing Group has caught Lesser Whitethroat, Marsh Warbler and the first Tayside Firecrest.

The estuary also attracts large numbers of Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Golden Plover, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank and Dunlin during the winter. The Redshank numbers are of international importance, with numbers of other species slightly less significant but nonetheless important. During late summer the area attracts small numbers of Ruff, Greenshank, Whimbrel and Curlew Sandpiper. Large numbers of Greylag and Pinkfooted Geese feed in surrounding fields and use the estuary for roosting; casual counts have estimated over 7,000 birds on the estuary during the winter months. Large numbers of Mallard and Goldeneye frequest the area along with lesser numbers of Tufted Duck, Merganser, Cormorant and occasionally some divers and auks.

During the winter considerable numbers of wildfowlers use the area. While many are local people an increasing number are from outwith Tayside and many are from overseas. At present there are no specific controls or limitations on the amount or location of shooting allowed and it is hoped that should the area become a Local Nature Reserve this situation can be monitored.

Should you wish to lend your support to this case or wish any further details please contact **Steve Moyes, 8 Grays Lane, Dundee DD2 3AN (0382 612643).**

Sedge Warbler at the nest *Brian Turner*
Exceptional numbers of these warblers breed in the Tay reed beds.

Seabird statistics

Recent issues have covered reductions in breeding numbers or success at some Scottish colonies, notably in Shetland. A new report, which will become an annual publication, summarises the 1989 breeding season and compares 1989 with results from 1986-88. The report draws together results from monitoring schemes organised by the Seabird Group, Shetland Oil Terminal Advisory Group, RSPB and NCC. It is published as NCC CSD Report No 1071 and edited by Paul Walsh, Mark Avery and Martin Heubeck.

Monitoring efforts are particularly directed at the numbers and breeding success of cliff-breeding species and of terns. Breeding success of widespread, wholly marine species such as Kittiwake, Fulmar and Shag may provide an effective means of monitoring changes in aspects of the wider marine environment especially food availability. Terns are of particular conservation importance in that breeding numbers are relatively small, and colonies subject to disturbance, predation and other factors.

The Northern Isles

The most dramatic recent changes in breeding productivity have been seen at Shetland colonies. Several species there especially those which feed mainly on small sandeels caught at or near the sea surface experienced total or near-total failure at a range of colonies in 1989. Breeding success there was equally poor in 1988, and had been declining for several species since 1984 or 1985. Studies confirm that a reduction in the availability of small sandeels in Shetland waters has been responsible. Breeding numbers of a range of species in Shetland are also in decline, in some cases pre-dating changes in breeding success.

Colonies in Orkney have not shown such dramatic changes in breeding success, but there are indications of declining success for some colonies and species.

Gannet *Martin Hayes*

North Sea coasts

At other North Sea colonies, a slight, but widespread, reduction in breeding success of cliff-breeding species was detected between 1987 and 1988. Success improved in 1989, except at Caithness colonies. Breeding numbers of species other than terns were generally stable or increasing during 1986-89, with most species appearing to increase between 1988 and 1989. Numbers of cliff-breeding species at the more northern (Caithness) colonies either declined slightly or showed no change in 1989.

On the west

Results from the west of Scotland indicate variable breeding success for a range of cliff-breeding species, with few consistent trends. In general, success was higher in 1989 than in 1988. Cliff-breeding species showed a general reduction of breeding numbers in 1989; changes during 1986-89 as a whole were variable.

Less comprehensive information on breeding success of cliff-breeding species is available for colonies in the southwest of Britain and in Ireland. However, Kittiwakes did show a marked reduction in breeding success in 1989. Numbers of a range of species also decreased in 1989, possible linked to an abnormally late breeding season recorded for several species and colonies.

Tubenoses

A significant improvement in Fulmar breeding success was seen at North Sea colonies (excluding Caithness) in 1989, after a poor year in 1988. Lowest 1989 figures were in Caithness, southeastern Orkney and parts of Shetland. Population trends were generally upwards at North Sea colonies during 1986-89 (including 1988-89 for regions south of Caithness), variable at west-coast colonies. Limited information for Manx Shearwater indicated below-average productivity on Canna (northwest Scotland) in 1989. Two small colonies were discovered in the Channel Islands.

Gannets and cormorants

Gannet breeding success remains high at the few colonies monitored. Numbers at small colonies continue to increase, and a new colony was established off County Dublin in 1989. Cormorant numbers show a continuing increase in most monitored regions. Breeding success in Shetland appeared normal. Breeding success of Shags declined at west coast colonies in 1989, and increased at North Sea colonies after a below-average year in 1988. Numbers often fluctuated markedly in 1986-89, but were generally declining on the west coast, more stable or increasing in the North Sea. Numbers decreased in all west-coast regions monitored in 1989.

Gaada Stack, Foula *Stan da Prato*
Foula is one of the most important seabird colonies in the North Atlantic. Its cliffs and coastal scenery are also impressive.

Gulls

Black-headed Gull numbers are generally increasing at monitored colonies. A major breeding failure of Lesser Black-backed Gulls was noted at Skomer and other colonies in south Wales in 1989. Numbers in Wales and southeast Scotland have fluctuated markedly. Herring Gull numbers appeared to be declining in most sampled regions, although some reversal of this was seen in 1989. Limited information for Great Black-backed Gull indicates increasing numbers in some regions, decreasing in others.

Kittiwakes

Kittiwake numbers decreased between 1988 and 1989 in all west coast regional samples; North Sea colonies generally showed stable or increasing numbers. Most Shetland colonies recorded total or near total breeding failure in 1988 and 1989. Elsewhere, 1989 productivity figures were lowest in southwest Britain and moderate or high in other regions.

Skuas

Numbers of Arctic Skuas in Shetland declined during 1986-88, and this apparently continued in 1989. Productivity there was extremely low in 1988 and, especially, 1989. Success was probably below-average on Orkney in 1989, but high in Sutherland. Population trends of Great Skuas in Shetland are unclear. Breeding success there was lower in 1988 and 1989 than in previous years, but rather variable. Success elsewhere appeared normal.

Terns

Numbers of Sandwich Terns in Britain and Ireland as a whole showed no general trend during 1986-89. A 15% decline at sampled colonies was noted in 1989, however. Roseate Tern numbers were relatively stable at about 450-500 pairs in Britain and Ireland during 1986-89, although pronounced movements between colonies were noted. Success was high in 1989 and earlier years. Common Terns in most regions were fairly stable, with fluctuations, although increased numbers were noted in several parts of Scotland in 1989. Success was very variable, largely reflecting levels of predation.

Arctic Terns in Shetland have experienced near total breeding failure every year from 1984 onwards, and numbers of breeding adults there declined by 55% between 1980 and 1989. Success in Orkney in 1989 was higher than in Shetland, but still low; numbers there have declined by 40% since 1980. Elsewhere, limited information suggests that overall numbers are relatively stable but with fluctuations.

Numbers of Little Terns in England and Wales were roughly stable during 1986-89, although this includes a 6% decrease between 1988 and 1989. Counts from elsewhere change this pattern little. Breeding success has been highly variable, between both years and colonies.

Great Black-backed Gull *Stan da Prato*

Auks

Guillemot numbers at many west coast colonies showed a sudden decline between 1988 and 1989, after generally increasing during 1986-88. Declines were also seen in Shetland, but numbers remained stable or increased at other North Sea colonies. Breeding success in 1989 was high at most colonies, including Shetland. Razorbill numbers decreased in most sampled regions in 1989, although few clear trends are evident for 1986-89. Success has generally been high, but instances of poor success or low growth-rates of chicks were recorded in Shetland in 1989.

Numbers of Black Guillemots in Shetland were stable or increasing during 1986-89 as a whole. There is little evidence of any recent reduction in breeding success in Shetland, except for total failure on Foula in 1988 and 1989. Puffin numbers at three sampled colonies in Scotland were roughly stable or increasing slightly during 1986-89, with fluctuations. Total or near total failure was recorded at several Shetland colonies during 1986-89. Success remains high at colonies on Fair Isle, in southeast Scotland and in south Wales.

Guillemot and Razorbill *Martin Hayes*

Bird poison black market

This will come as no surprise to readers of this magazine which has had to feature so many incidents where supposedly protected species, some of them with populations in the country of less than a hundred birds, have been poisoned. Too often cases, themselves only the tip of the iceberg, fail due to lack of evidence. Details of the inquiry were given by RSPB investigator Dave Dick after a case at Duns Sheriff Court in which a Berwickshire gamekeeper was cleared on a charge of setting poisoned bait on the Manderston estate. It had been alleged that William Brennand, the keeper at Manderston, had poisoned two crows in March 1990. Sheriff James Paterson, after hearing prosecution evidence, decided there was no case to answer and found Brennand not guilty.

Increasing concern

The RSPB is becoming increasingly concerned at the number of birds, including rare birds of prey, which are being indiscriminately poisoned by alphachloralose, a substance which can be used legally only to kill mice indoors. A keeper in Perthshire was fined £1,200 for possessing alphachloralos and another poison, phosdrin, in December 1990.

With 25 to 30 cases involving poison and birds in Scotland last year, the RSPB faces a major problem. A number of prosecutions are imminent. The investigation extends beyond Scotland. Around 90% of the cases of alleged poisoning involve shooting estates.

Top priority

"This problem has become a top priority for us" Dave said. "We have had one indication that poison is changing hands at £70 per kilo and in almost every search I have been involved in we have come up with alphachloralose".

Dave told the court how he found three dead crows near a pheasant release pen on the Manderston estate and two jars containing alphachloralose in Mr Brennand's house and in his pick-up truck. He said that, in his experience, illegal baiting often took place close to pheasant pens and in at least 90% of cases the birds died closer to the bait.

Dr Kenneth Hunter, scientific officer in charge of Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland investigations into the death of wild life involving pesticides, confirmed that two of the crows taken to his laboratory for analysis had died from alphachloralose poisoning. He explained the poison would stupefy the birds initially and then act on the temperature regulating mechanism, causing them to die of exposure.

Rat poison?

In the Manderston case, the alphachloralose in Mr Brennand's possession had been of the so-called pure formulation (100% alphachloralose). A second DAFS scientist, Elizabeth Sharpe, told the court that formulations containing 4% alphachloralose were available to "amateurs" to kill mice, while 100% formulations were for professional use only by qualified rodent controllers.

Police sergeant Malcolm Henderson said that when Brennand was asked about the poison in his possession, he had replied: "I use that for killing rats".

Sheriff Paterson said that where a keeper was in possession of a poison and birds were found poisoned there must be grave suspicion that the keeper was responsible. But that was not enough and it was impossible for him to be sure that the birds in this case died from poison ingested on the Manderston Estate.

Harrier and poisoned rabbit *RSPB*

Minister's keeper on poison charges

A gamekeeper at a Perthshire estate owned by a government minister has been fined £1,200 for possessing two poisons often used to kill birds of prey.

Gordon McGregor, chairman of the local community council and a former special constable, admitted keeping alphachloralose and phosdrin in an unlocked shed on the Glenfernate Estate at Enochdu.

His employer, David Heathcoat-Amory, until recently a minister at the Department of the Environment, denied any knowledge of the use of lethal poisons on his land. Mr Heathcoat-Amory, who is now an energy minister, had responsibilities for the environment and the countryside at the time of the offences on his 9,000-acre estate.

He said "We have a strict policy of keeping within the law and any wrongdoing was entirely outwith my knowledge."

Sheriff John Wheatley, at Perth Sheriff Court, said it was clear the poisons were used either with the intention of killing birds, or with such disregard that animals and birds were destroyed.

The RSPB said it was the first time the Food & Environmental Protection Act had been used to cover the unsafe storage of poisons. The society hailed the case as a major breakthrough in the fight against illegal baiting.

RSPB spokesman Stuart Benn added "The act is extremely complicated and it is the first time it has been used this way. It means that people found in possession of the chemicals can be guilty of a serious offence and it should lead to more prosecutions."

McGregor was fined £200 under the Food Act and £1,000 under the Wildlife and Countryside Act for having poisons capable of being used to commit an offence.

Inquiries were started after the discovery of a dead sheepdog, which had apparently been poisoned. A dead Buzzard was also found just outside the estate boundary.

The court heard there was no legal reason for McGregor to have the substances for his work and possession of them was a clear sign he had been involved in illegal baiting.

The defence solicitor claimed his client who had worked on the estate for 30 years, had committed the offences out of ignorance and had inherited the poisons from a previous keeper.

Mr Heathcoat-Amory, who lists his interests in *Who's Who* as fishing, shooting and the countryside, said he did not know a great deal about the case because his father ran the stalking on Glenfernate and managed the keepers.

A Private Member's Bill was introduced into the House of Commons in December 1990, seeking to increase the accountability of landowners and others for illegal actions which cause the death of wildlife on their land. The Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill was introduced by Don Coleman, Labour MP for Neath.

Egg collecting still threatens rare birds

Egg collecting may be a critical threat to the continued existence of Britain's rarest breeding birds. In a new report, the RSPB reveals there are more than 300 known illegal egg collectors active in Britain, with a further 140 suspected. New collectors are becoming known to the Society at a rate of 20-40 a year. Since 1960, about 50 Osprey nests have been robbed (more than 40 in the last 10 years) and 80 Red Kite nests (46 in the last 10 years). The number of robberies and their impact on the populations of these rare birds would have been much higher without special nest protection schemes. The Red-backed Shrike has always been attractive to collectors who may have hastened the demise of this species, which last bred in England in 1988. One recently confiscated collection contained 92 clutches of shrike eggs, mostly collected in the 1970s.

Challenge in Glen Dye

Rows over forestry in the uplands are hardly new. What is new about the controversy over Heatheryhaugh in Glen Dye is that the local authority is challenging the Forestry Commission's procedures which normally determine whether grant aided planting can go ahead.

Grouse moor

The land in question used to be one of the best grouse moors in north east Scotland. Besides grouse there are breeding Golden Plovers, Short-eared Owls and Merlins. Sometimes there are Hen Harriers and Golden Eagles though both have suffered from illegal persecution. Apart from birds the area is noted for its scenery which tourists often stop to admire from the Cairn o'Mount road.

The land is owned by Sir William Gladstone, former Chief Scout and Lord Lieutenant of Clwyd. The plan is to plant up 807 hectares with conifers, 66 ha with broadleaves and leave 30 ha to regenerate naturally. Current estimates of the value of grant aid from the taxpayer are around £800,000.

Range of objectors

Objections to the scheme have come from at least 17 organisations. They include bird groups, such as RSPB and the Grampian Branch of the SOC, as well as ramblers and mountaineers. The government's own conservation advisers, the NCC, have also objected. However, the Regional Advisory Committee of the Forestry Commission accepted the scheme with some modifications. Its chairman is a neighbouring landowner. One of its members, a professor of botany, could see no botanical grounds for refusal. The case went to the Scottish Office and Lord Sanderson, who was then the relevant Minister, said that although a few moorland birds would be displaced the objectors claims were exaggerated and the scheme was a good one. Subsequent correspondence failed to produce any hard facts to back up this rather high handed opinion.

Kincardine and Deeside District Council has decided to challenge the decision in the courts on the grounds that no environmental assessment was carried out. This would now be required but the request for grant came three days before the rules were changed. There is also the point that several of the breeding birds are covered by Annex One of the EEC Wild Bird Directive.

The Scottish Office and conservation

None of this inspires confidence that the Scottish Office can be trusted to protect important habitats. To quote Dr Adam Watson, who lives nearby, "when the Scottish Office makes such a muck up of such an important environmental issue, where so many organisations objected, it cannot expect to be taken seriously when it tries to justify being put in charge of Scotland's natural heritage.

Highland forests

Scotland could once again be a fertile, rich and healthy country supporting many more people to a much higher standard of living. That is the vision of Bernard Planterose, author of the Scottish Green Party's *Rural Manifesto for the Highlands: Creating the Second Great Wood of Caledon. The SOC does not support any political party but the ideas in this document seem worthy of public discussion.*

For 10 years Planterose and his wife Emma have been replanting Isle Martin, the RSPB reserve near Ullapool, with native trees, and for the last three years they have been running a tree nursery near Scourie.

To Bernard the Scottish landscape is not beautiful. It is a sad and pathetic relic of what was once there – diverse forest and a rich human resource which has been ruined by centuries of neglect and abuse.

The Great Wood of Caledon existed between the last Great Ice Age and about 1,000 years ago, extending across the Highlands to the outer isles. Neolithic settlements began the destruction of the forest and the Vikings made a second major impact, burning large areas in warfare. Then in the 17th and 18th centuries the Great Wood was cleared for iron smelting in the west and, more recently, for timber, cattle, deer and sheep.

This long history of ecological devastation has left the Highlands almost totally deforested and in the final phase of vegetation and soil degeneration.

The tree nursery is situated in a national nature reserve; the most northerly remnant of woodland on the Scottish mainland, supporting oak among the birch, hazel, willow and aspen. Business is good, with many people keen to establish shelter belts and woodlands throughout the north-west. So successful has it been that the nursery has difficulty meeting demand and the Planteroses believe that other crofters in the Highland's could also consider growing native trees commercially.

The manifesto lists the first steps towards rebulding the Highlands. It involves abandoning industrial forestry practices and reducing grazing pressure from sheep and deer. Controversially it suggests "reallocation of land in private and public hands where that ownership is seen to be impeding the full and desirable growth of the rural economy".

Resistance to these ideas will come from both crofters, who see their grazing rights to the hills as inalienable, and landowners.

"In advocating that crofting and estate management in Scotland turns towards the Norwegian model, where there is a respect and understanding for nature and trees in particular which is outstanding, we are not advising anything that land managers would not love to have. Who would reject beautiful woods providing shelter for animals, shelter for soft-fruit growing, wood for fuel and local building and fencing materials? Who would reject the employment potential that small scale forest management brings? In the Highlands of Scotland we accept an incredibly limited range of locally produced food and other natural resources. There is no reason why we should not work to change this. If Norway can do it, why shouldn't we?"

The Planteroses want to organise a conference tour of south-west Norway for Scots involved in Highland land use. "We'd like to get as many people as possible across the North Sea to look at a country so similar in geology, topography and climate and yet so different in its integration of mixed forest and agriculture."

Nesting Buzzards *Bobby Smith*
The debate about forestry is not whether Scotland should have more trees but what sort of trees and in what places.

Spring counts of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese in Britain, 1990

The ninth in the current phase of spring counts of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese in Britain took place over the weekend 31 March/1 April 1990. The total numbers of both Pink-feet (ca. 122,000) and Greylags (ca. 64,000) recorded were the highest on record for any spring census, and represented 67% and 77%, respectively, of the numbers that had been counted in the previous November. The majority of the Pink-feet were in north-east, central and south-west Scotland, with the proportion of the count in most regions being relatively consistent with that recorded in previous spring surveys. Greylags were widely spread and the highest numbers occurred in Orkney, throughout most of north-east, central and south-west Scotland, and in Northumberland. Their gross distribution across the country appeared more variable from year to year than that of Pink-feet.

Any site regularly supporting over 1,100 Pink-feet or Greylags can be regarded as Internationally Important. All sites exceeding this level in the spring are shown in the Tables. The number of Pink-feet counted at the Slains Lochs/Ythan Estuary site on 31 March 1990 was remarkable (representing about 25% of the total number counted in Britain), and further counts on 2 and 6 April produced totals of 28,800 and 16,800 at Meikle Loch alone. The Slains Lochs/Ythan Estuary site and the Loch of Strathbeg, Westwater Reservoir and Wigtown Bay represent key areas for Pink-feet in the spring. Greylags are more evenly distributed between the key sites than are Pink-feet with Findhorn Bay representing the most important spring site for them.

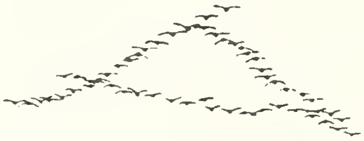


Table 1. Sites with more than 2,000 Pink-feet in the springs of 1988-90. Counts for 1988 represent March/April maxima.

	1988	1989	1990	AVERAGE
Slains Lochs/Ythan	21,700	21,00	30,300	24,333
Loch of Strathbeg	20,900	16,500	17,100	18,167
Westwater Reservoir	9,100	19,300	11,000	13,133
Wigtown Bay	7,000	14,000	9,000	10,000
Solway Estuary	10,700	9,000	(500)	9,850
Carsebreck	6,300	7,200	7,000	6,833
Bankfoot/Tullybelton/Dupplin	5,700	4,400	10,250	6,783
Findhorn Bay	2,200	9,800	5,276	5,759
Loch Eye/Cromarty Firth	6,400	7,000	2,060	5,153
Inverness/Beauly Firth	8,100	2,600	3,260	4,653
Fala Flow	6,800	3,000	2,950	4,250
Loch Leven	3,200	5,100	—	4,150
Lake of Menteith	2,100	6,000	—	4,050
Montrose Basin	4,200	4,500	2,407	3,702
Cameron Reservoir	4,000	3,700	3,000	3,567
Lour/Crombie Reservoir	2,100	6,200	450	2,917
Gladhouse Reservoir	2,500	0	5,000	2,500
Lancashire mosses	4,600	1,300	1,000	2,300
Mid-Deeside (Dinnet Lochs)	750	4,500	400	1,883

N.B. The 1990 count of the Solway Estuary was incomplete.

Table 2. Sites with more than 1,000 Greylags in the springs of 1988-90. Counts for 1988 represent March/April maxima.

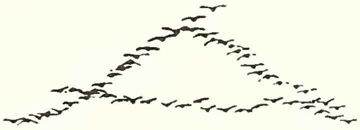
	1988	1989	1990	AVERAGE
Findhorn Bay	3,100	8,300	4,032	5,144
Caithness	5,000	2,800	2,958	3,586
Haddo Country Park	2,400	2,300	4,700	3,133
Loch Spynie	3,800	3,000	1,962	2,921
Loch of Strathbeg	1,800	4,300	1,750	2,617
Loch Eye/Cromarty Firth	1,800	4,100	1,012	2,304
Orkney (Mainland)	2,000	2,100	2,676	2,259
Fedderate Reservoir	1,000	2,400	2,700	2,033
Bute	1,900	1,900	—	1,900
Lake of Menteith	3,600	0	—	1,800
Drummond Pond	2,500	1,100	1,800	1,800
Bogrotten Ponds	—	—	1,600	(1,600)
Kilconquhar Loch	320	1,700	2,500	1,507
Loch Ken	1,400	1,100	1,900	1,467
Inverness/Beauly Firth	670	1,800	1,880	1,450
Mid-Deeside (Dinnet Lochs)	2,600	650	1,000	1,417
Stranraer Lochs	1,100	250	2,150	1,167
Lindisfarne	1,200	—	1,050	1,125
Caistron Quarry	1,500	1,250	600	1,117

Goose mortality at Montrose

An hour or two before dawn on 16 October 1990, a trough of low pressure passing east over eastern Scotland produced an hour of intense thunderstorm activity, and a downpour of rain. When dawn broke, approximately 60 to 70 dead Pink-footed Geese were found lying in several sites around Montrose, Tayside, apparently having been struck by lightning while in flight. Most were found in one small area after flying very low in a built-up area. The wounds of those examined included inch-wide bare strips on the plumage and, in three cases, the complete loss of tail feathers and the 'parson's noses'! The quill bases on the denuded areas were blackened, but there was little other evidence of singeing. Sixteen corpses were embedded in the exposed tidal mud of the Montrose basin, with the position of some indicating a fall from a considerable altitude.

A Barnacle Goose, also found dead, had been ringed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in 1973. It was part of a steady influx observed over East Scotland between 10 and 16 October, and was on its way from Spitsbergen to Caerlaverock for the 18th time!

Mortality of birds in thunderstorms is not unusual, although the most common cause of death is heavy hail. There have also been instances of deaths in extremely violent upcurrents and turbulence such as are found in tornadoes, both in Britain and the USA (see N. Elkins, *Weather and Bird Behaviour*, pp. 186-187). Lightning strikes seem to be rare, with most records concerning wildfowl in flight, particularly geese. The time of the Montrose incident suggests that the thunder may have put the birds to flight. Geese are well known for their sensitivity to the least disturbance. That thunder has this effect is supported by an observation at Rockcliffe, Cumbria, some years ago, in which a flock of Barnacle Geese took to the air during a thunderstorm and climbed rapidly to disappear into the cloud. Five dead geese were found later, thought to have been struck by lightning, though apparently unmarked.



Observing an incident involving the disturbance of a sudden clap of thunder of a large herd of Bewick's Swans at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, the late Sir Peter Scott surmised that such arctic breeders (which include many geese) may seldom experience thunderstorms (per Dr Malcolm Ogilvie). Certainly, thunderstorm frequency statistics suggest that the majority of geese which winter in Scotland hear thunder no more than once every five years on their breeding grounds. However, although eastern regions of the UK and Ireland have an average of less than one thunderstorm per winter, in western regions they are three to five times more frequent.

We are indebted to Drs Malcolm Ogilvie and Myrfyn Owen for commenting upon and amplifying the events described.

Norman Elkins & Rick Goater

Damage to key conservation sites

The protection of key nature areas was one of the major concerns of the Nature Conservancy Council, the Chairman, Sir William Wilkinson, said at the launch of the 16th Annual Report – the NCC's last before being broken up on 1st April. "The actual protection mechanism for SSSIs is not strong enough", Sir William said. "For the 900 or so key conservation sites in particular, stronger measures are needed. There needs to be the strongest possible presumption against any development which would involve their damage or destruction."

On the Government's earlier proposals to privatise National Nature Reserves, Sir William said that these had now been dropped. "It certainly would not have forwarded the cause of National Nature Reserves, nor indeed of nature conservation," he said. "What is really needed are measures to ensure that these sites are managed with nature conservation as their prime objective – managed in a way that the nature conservation interest will be properly preserved or, better still, enhanced. I should like to see the new agencies having sufficient resources to manage our existing National Nature Reserves much more dynamically and to cater for a wider range of interests than we do at the moment. There would be a great deal to be said for having one substantial NNR in each of our regions designed specially to cater for visitors, including school and university parties."

Key sites

Director General Timothy Hornsby said that in the year covered by the report, the NCC had submitted a further 19 Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites, although Government had so far only designated six of these and 30 SPA/Ramsar sites already submitted still awaited designation.

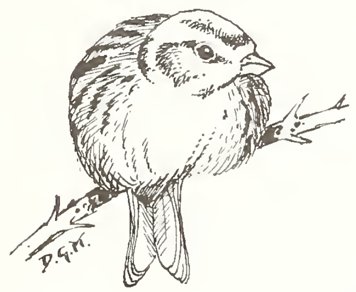
NCC had slightly exceeded the target of 95% renotification of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). By the end of the reporting period, a total of 5,435 had been renotified, accounting for 8% of the GB land surface.

However, a total of 430 incidents of damge was recorded last year, affecting 91,677 hectares (about 226,583 acres), Mr Hornsby said. "About three quarters of this was of a short-term nature, caused largely by such agricultural activities as over-grazing of moorland. However 6% tended to be particularly serious, caused by statutory bodies or by activities that had received planning permission. Mr Hornsby added that other damage was caused by recreational activities (mainly by off-road use by vehicles) and by lack of proper management.

End of the NCC

In talking about the end of the GB-wide NCC, Sir William gave a short account of the successes – and failures – of its 41-year history and of its unexpected demise. Since 1981 the role and fate of the NCC had been intimately bound up with the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which, although generally welcomed as a sensible response to what had become a crisis for our wildlife habitats, had never been fully accepted by all interested parties.

"Many landowners and farmers have never been happy with the apparent infringement of their basic liberty to manage their land as they thought fit," Sir William said. "This somewhat uneasy acquiescence became linked illogically and unfairly to nationalist aspirations, which in reality should have had little to do with nature conservation. In addition, the legislation stood in the way, though it was far from barring it, of certain schemes for wholesale afforestation, most notably in Caithness and Sutherland. There were conflicts, but I do not believe these could have been avoided – and certainly not if NCC were to carry out its duties seriously and responsibly. Matters would have been eased, if Government support had been more flexible and imaginative in devising schemes to support incomes and maintain traditional methods of managing the countryside and protect employment. The absurdity could then have been avoided of having to perpetrate environment damage on the grounds of creating or protecting jobs – probably ineffectively in the longer run, since many of these jobs are likely to be short term."



Yellowhammer *David Mitchell*

Future challenges

Wishing the new country agencies and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee well, the Chairman highlighted some major problems which will challenge them in the future: marine nature conservation, inappropriate use of pesticides, animal overstocking in the uplands, the requirement for positive management of conservation sites and the need for a comprehensive UK scientific perspective.

Confusion of grants

In drawing attention to the urgent need for all forms of grant schemes to be rationalised, he said, "They all aim to help farmers and landowners to do better by the countryside, but this proliferation undoubtedly causes confusion and reduces the effectiveness of many of the schemes. Some form of 'one-stop' shopping, perhaps with a menu of measures offered, might be a way of helping both the farmers and the countryside. Agricultural departments, backed by specialist advice from bodies such as the NCC or its successors might be the best way forward."

The Chairman thanked the voluntary conservation organisations for their magnificent support in protesting at the Government's ill-judged decision to dismember the NCC. The demise of the NCC marked a shift of influence. There would remain a need to develop coherent national policies. Here, Sir William said, the voluntary bodies are increasingly taking up the challenge.

Some results of the BSBI monitoring scheme 1987-88 from Scotland

The BSBI Monitoring Scheme, a project to assess the current status of the British flora funded by NCC, was finished in March 1990. As the 10-km squares selected for the BSBI Scheme are also being used by the BTO for their key square survey, some results and experiences may be of interest to the SOC.

The response to the Scheme was absolutely fantastic. 985,000 records were collcted by over 1600 botanists throughout Britain and Ireland. Coverage overall was about 99%, and in Scotland only one 10-km square and 10 tetrads (mainly in remote areas of the west) were not visited.

When these records were compared with those collected for the *Atlas of the British flora* to assess change, numerous examples of recording bias were found. There were 16% more records for the Monitoring Scheme simply due to a greater concentration of effort by a larger number of botanists on a smaller number of squares. Although the time spent recording was noted for the Monitoring Scheme, this was not available for the Atlas and no correction for differences in effort could be made. The main consequence is that it is only possible to assess which species have changed most – those that have changed to a lesser degree cannot be picked out. For instance, although there is an increase in Canadian Pondweed in Scotland (as noted in *Scottish Bird News* 19), the increase is not large enough to be distinguished statistically from recording bias. Next time the Scheme is run, more attention will have to be paid to minimising recording bias, perhaps by standardising time spent in certain areas along the lines of the BTO survey.

Significant changes to about 20% of the flora were noted however, but there were few distinct trends in the data to indicate why species have changed. In general, arable weeds and plants of open and wet grasslands have declined, whilst introductions have increased. In Scotland, even these trends are unclear and the picture is one of general change.

Tim Rich
BSBI Monitoring Scheme Organizer

Atlas in Scotland

After three years fieldwork 95% coverage has been achieved. The gaps are in remote parts of Argyll, Ross and Sutherland. In addition many squares have unrealistically low numbers of species recorded so far. It has, therefore, been decided to have a fourth years fieldwork. Local organisers have the details. Supplementary records for any squares are still welcome.

East Lothian Dartfords?

To the amazement of ecologists Scottish Conservation Projects have suggested "coppicing" gorse at Barns Ness, Lothian as they think this will provide suitable habitat for Dartford Warblers.

Foxes and lambs in the Scottish hills

Foxes are widely regarded as serious predators upon lambs in upland Britain, particularly in Scotland. The evidence is largely anecdotal and unduly influenced by the finding of substantial numbers of lamb carcases at a few fox dens. However, a considerable effort, some of it supported by Government funds, is directed towards the killing of foxes. Although SBN is a bird magazine the arguments over the effects of foxes and the need or otherwise for fox control have obvious parallels with some avian predators and scavengers. Recent research aimed at establishing whether predation on lambs would increase when fox control ceases is so interesting that we feel SOC members will appreciate this short summary of Ray Hewson's report.

How many lambs?

Estimates of lambs lost to foxes vary widely. The highest estimate is the 8.3% of the National Farmers Union's questionnaire survey of 1972. However experience in the USA, where there have been many studies of predation, shows that questionnaire surveys, even properly conducted, show significantly greater losses than do field studies. In 1968 complaints by farmers that foxes harbouring in forests in mid-Argyll were killing lambs were investigated by Field Officers of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. The survey, in which 64 farmers were questioned, showed alleged losses ranging from 1.9% on holdings with more than 500 sheep to 4.3% of lambs on holding with 500 or fewer sheep. This suggests that some factor in the management of sheep was more important than proximity to forests. Field studies in Argyll in 1976-79 showed minimum losses to foxes of 1.3, 1.8, 0.8 and, 0.6% of the lamb crop in successive years. Judging by their fat reserves the lambs killed were viable.

A Highland gamekeeper observed "It will be a bad day for the shepherd when the last fox goes from the hills." He was referring to the "black loss", the lambs which disappear from the hill due to a variety of unknown causes including predation by foxes. It is convenient to blame foxes for a large part of the black loss, and it is an excuse that is seldom disputed. Any research on foxes is therefore apt to be viewed with suspicion or hostility.

Increasing foxes

Although an increase in foxes following the banning of the gin trap in 1973 had been predicted, gin trapping was not widely practised outside the Highlands at that time. Most adult foxes were killed by snaring and cubs by terriers or gassing. Gin traps set at bait in pools, where the fox drowned when caught, were used principally in the Highlands where they formed the chief method of control. In recent years more foxes have been shot by spotlighting in the winter months.

Even with the gin trap the control of foxes in Scotland was ineffective in checking a steady increase of foxes from 1948-49. A marked peak in numbers in 1955/56, associated with myxomatosis which initially provided an abundant supply of diseased rabbits, was followed by a sharp decline when rabbits became scarce. An increase followed and between 1961 and 1972 foxes spread into parts of north-east Scotland and around the Moray Firth where they had been absent for many years. More foxes were killed by the Forestry Commission and by Fox Clubs in 1971-78 than in the previous decade but the steady increase of earlier years was not maintained and the annual kills fluctuated more widely. Fluctuations in foxes killed were associated with big changes in the numbers of field voles.

Fox in the heather Mike Ashley

A study of the effect of killing foxes in winter upon the number of breeding dens the following spring showed that with a steadily increasing number of foxes killed the number of dens remained constant. It is generally agreed among shepherds that lamb-killing by foxes is associated with breeding dens. These are likely to be regulated by food shortages and the social behaviour of foxes.

Need for research

By 1974 it had become apparent that there was a need for experiments in which the control of foxes is relaxed over a period of years and the effects of predation measured. Research by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) ended in 1981 without any such experiment being done. In 1987 the League Against Cruel Sports funded a three-year experiment at Eriboll in north-west Scotland, where the effect on predation on lambs by foxes when no foxes were killed was measured. The project, funded by the League with £85,000, was conducted by Dr Ray Hewson, who had previously conducted research into foxes and sheep farming for DAFS. His previous studies have shown that whilst up to 24% of lambs may be lost in the Highlands due to malnutrition, hypothermia, disease and still-births, only 1%-2% are taken by foxes. However, sheep farmers have claimed that without rigorous control, fox numbers could rise dramatically, that they would deplete their natural food supply and then predate more heavily on lambs.

The new research was designed to test this theory. The owners of a large sheep-rearing estate, consisting of 70 square kilometres on which 1400 Cheviot ewes forage, agreed to suspend all fox-control from March 1987 to March 1990, so any increases in fox numbers and the effect on lamb production could be measured. It was agreed that during the experiment full compensation would be paid for any lambs lost to foxes.

Results

The project has now been completed. In the study area of Eriboll it was found that in the absence of fox control, even in an area where natural food supplies were scarce, fox numbers did not increase and losses of lambs were if anything lower than in other areas where foxes are rigorously controlled. In previous studies carried out by DAFS, losses of 1%-2% of lambs to foxes were found, even where foxes have been trapped, snared and shot. At Eriboll, which practices 'in-bye' lambing, (bringing ewes off the hill to sheltered fields close to the farm) losses would be expected to be lower than on those farms where ewes are left to give birth out in the harsh conditions of the hill. However, the year before the study, an Eriboll shepherd had claimed that 6-12 lambs had been lost to foxes despite normal fox control whereas no more than 4 lambs were predated by foxes in any of the monitored lambing seasons in the absence of control.

The research confirmed the results of previous studies in that the preferred food of foxes was sheep carrion, rabbits, field-voles and birds. There is an annual mortality of around 6% of ewes on the hills – the resultant carrion representing a substantial food resource for foxes. This scavenging of carcases by foxes and their predation on voles and rabbits which compete with sheep for grazing cannot of course be regarded as a threat to farmers and indeed may be regarded as beneficial.

The new research suggests that suspending fox control does not lead to an increase in fox numbers or in losses of lambs. The investigation shows that the present traditional persecution of foxes as a normal part of the Scottish sheep-farming cycle cannot be scientifically justified. Obviously, there may be rare occasions when a fox or fox family becomes a problem and there would be no objection to selective action being taken against such foxes. But there is no scientific justification for the present blanket suffering and death meted out to the fox population.

Public money

In Scotland there are 29 Fox Destruction Clubs grant-aided to the extent of 50% of their expenditure by DAFS. It is known that in the mid 1980s the annual grant-aid by DAFS to these clubs exceeded £30,000. Further funding of the Fox Destruction Clubs is provided by farmers who pay a levy of between 4p and 70p per head of the number of their ewes. Further state expenditure is incurred by the Forestry Commission whose staff killed 1682 adult foxes and 794 cubs in 1988/89. The Forestry Commission acknowledges that foxes are beneficial to woodland by killing rabbits, hares and field voles, and that their fox-killing activity is a "good neighbour" policy for the benefit of sheep farmers.

Foxes in the future

No one change in land use can explain the increase of foxes in Scotland over the last forty years. More afforestation provides in the early stages an abundance of field voles as food for foxes. Fox dens may be more secure when the trees reach thicket stage but the field voles will largely have died out, and because of food shortages foxes may fail to breed. If the rate of new planting diminishes there will be less food for foxes.

Foreseeable developments in Scotland include increased game shooting, more people going to the hills, more tourism, a decline in sheep farming in favour of deer forests and changes in the rate of afforestation. Increased game shooting may lead to more rigorous control of foxes on low ground. Tourism and hill walking are unlikely to have any effect. Foxes are not inimical to the interests of deer stalkers. While the effects of a change in land management to deer forest are difficult to predict they may well include less carrion and consequently fewer foxes with more voles and rabbits to feed them. So far as hill sheep areas are concerned sheep carrion in winter is likely to determine the level of the fox population. Improvement in management leading to fewer dead sheep might reduce the fox population more than the current methods of control.

The report Victim of Myth: predation from lambs by foxes in the absence of conrol is published by the League Against Cruel Sports, 83/87 Union Street, London SE1 1SG Telephone: 071-403 6155.

Otters at Kylerhea

Scotland, or at least its north and west coasts, is probably the best place in Europe to see otters. Few birdwatchers are so single minded as to refuse to turn their binoculars on such interesting mammals. If you want to see otters, but haven't managed so far, it really is much easier than books on mammals written by people south of the Border, where otters are both scarcer and more nocturnal, make out. Anywhere on the north and west coasts and islands is liable to produce a sighting. To maximise your chances choose a sheltered sea loch where you can walk or drive slowly along the lochside. Otters are not just seen at dawn or dusk in such places; half tide is often a good time to see them fishing. Calm conditions make it much easier to spot the movement that gives away the animal's presence.

Special hide

Another option is to spend time in the purpose built otter hide at Kylerhea Otter Haven on Skye at the narrows between Loch Alsh and the Sound of Sleat. The strong currents here seem to encourage a good variety of potential prey for otters as well as other fish eaters such as Cormorants and herons.

The Otter Haven has been set up by the Forestry Commission in association with the Vincent Wildlife Trust. Besides good feeding opportunities the area has suitable cover for denning and is relatively undisturbed by people and their dogs. With patience otters can be seen either from the hide or the path that leads to it. It is important to follow the instructions and not create excessive noise or allow dogs to wander in the sanctuary area. The hide has two considerable advantages. It is dry when it rains (remember this is Skye!) and relatively midge proof.

Seeing the otters

You are most likely to see otters in the sea, fairly close to the shore where they swim amongst the kelp, or climbing onto the rocks to feed. Here on the west coast of Scotland they are largely diurnal and may appear at any time.

It can be difficult to distinguish an otter from seals; however their behaviour will usually be the telling factor. An otter in the water tends to have a smal flat head followed by a low elongated hump of a back. On diving the tail will often flick out of the water. Seals tend to have a squatter domed head, with eyes usually quite visible, unlike those of an otter. Their dives tend to be for longer, and begin with a placid rolling or "bottling" action.

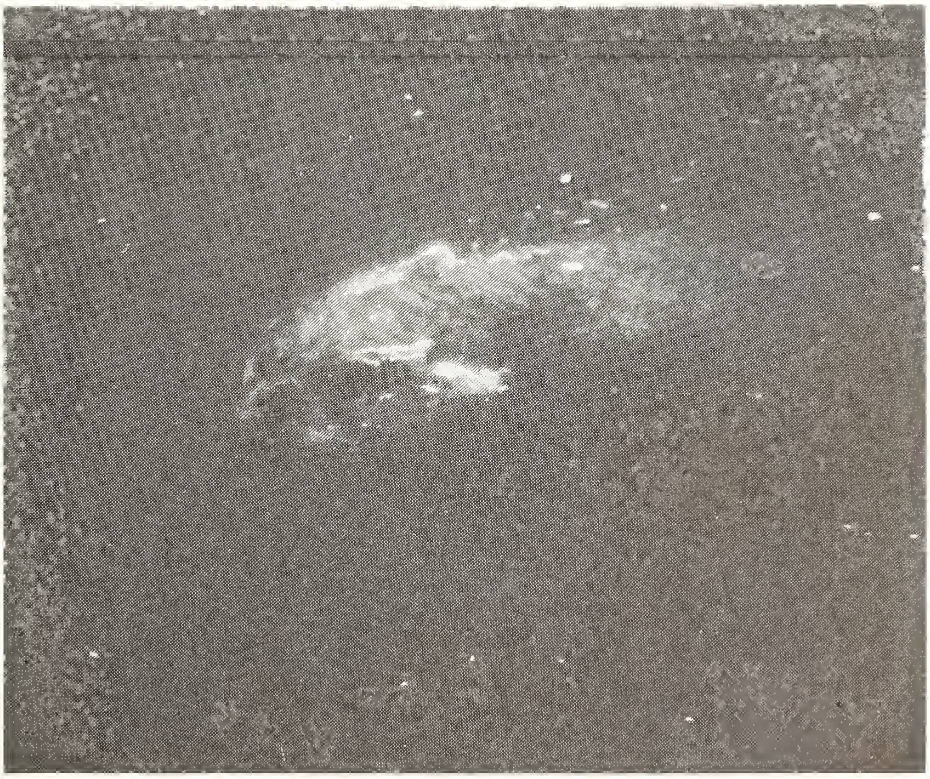
At Kylerhea there are many more seals than otters so be careful, especially with animals in the water at long range.

Birds as well

The Otter Haven is a small part of a much larger area that holds a good variety of wildlife. On a recent visit, despite rain, Golden Eagle and Peregrine were seen, among a range of other birds from Gannet to Wren. There is even a slight chance of White-tailed Eagle as individuals occasionally fly through the area.

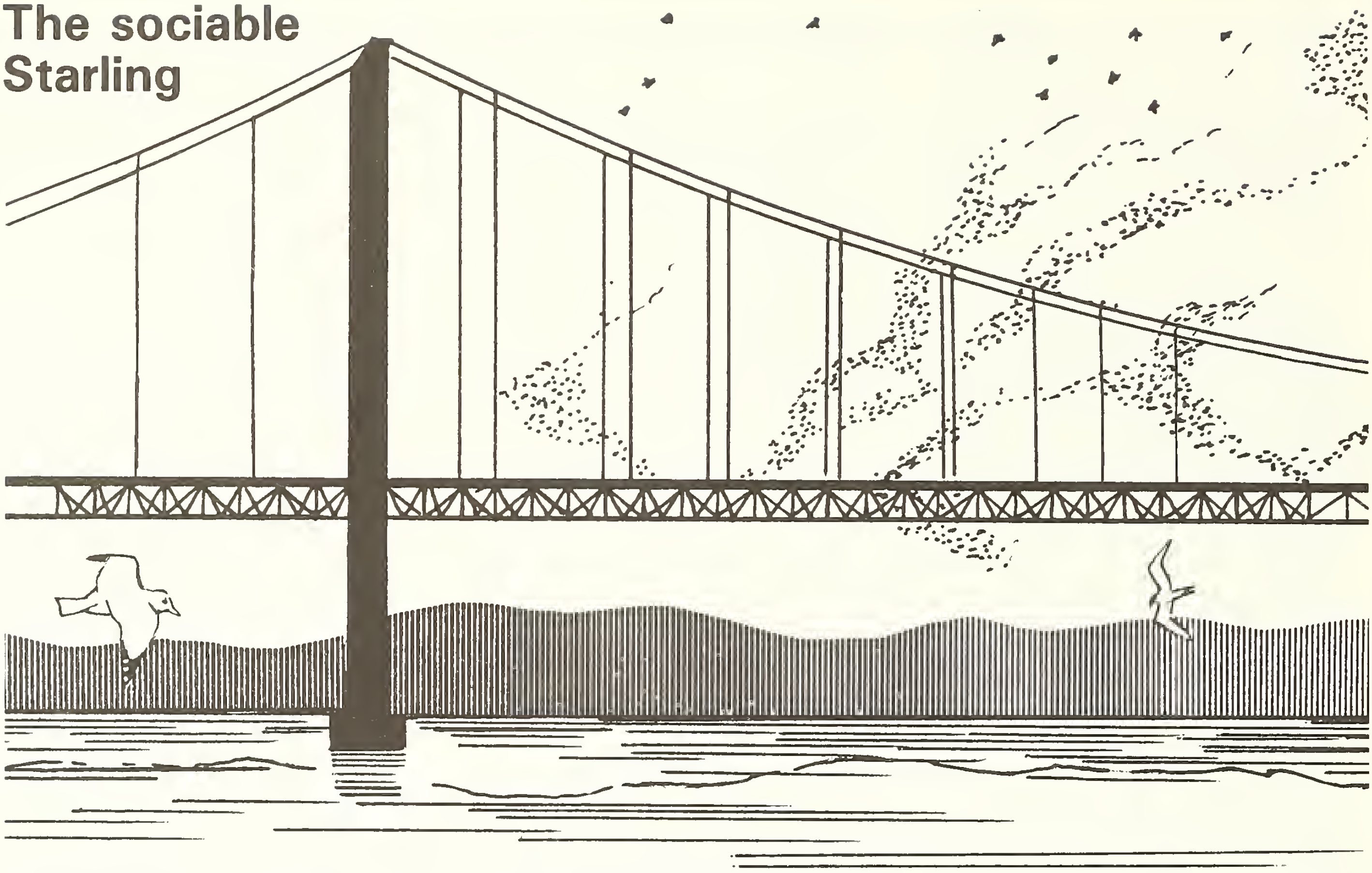
Kylerhea is signposted off the A850 road that runs west from the Kyle of Lochalsh – Kyleakin ferry towards Broadford. There is a car park from where a good track leads to the hide in about 20 minutes depending on whether you stop to scan en route. Further information can be obtained from the **Vincent Wildlife Trust, Baltic Exchange Buildings, 21 Bury Street, London EC3A 5AU** or the **Forestry Office** at **Balmacara, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ross-shire IV40 8DN**. The FC campsite at Balmacara is also of interest as Pine Martens sometimes scavenge campers' scraps, though they tend to be nocturnal and easily frightened, especially by dogs.

SdP



Otter underwater *Stan da Prato*

The sociable Starling



As many commuters will know thousands of Starlings roost through the winter on the Forth Bridges. So far all attempts to dislodge them have failed. Their flight lines have even caused concern at Edinburgh Airport several miles inland. Many of the Starlings that winter in Scotland come from nothern or eastern Europe; birds ringed in the Lothians have been recovered in Finland and the USSR in the breeding season. Observant readers who notice the Sandwich Tern in Mike Ashley's drawing have not found an error as individual terns often occur in the Forth in winter.

I smiled inwardly as the usual cliche was trotted out: "The sky was black with them", the farmer exclaimed, and he went on to vividly describe how the large amoeba-like swarm swooped across the trees, spilling birds onto the wood, small numbers at first but more and more with each pass of the flock. The clamour of birds attaining a position for the night lasted for hours before the noise died to a twitter.

Bird spectacle

Watching a winter Starling roost settle for the night is one of the most marvellous bird spectacles that one can see in Britain, but it is rarely appreciated by farmers because of the losses that such large numbers of birds can incur. "When are you going to get rid of them?" asked the farmer. It was a perfectly reasonable expectation as I was then an employee of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. "Well, actually I was hoping that they could be left undisturbed so I could study them". Although Starlings are one of our commonest birds there are many aspects of their behaviour that are poorly understood, including roosting behaviour.

Several roosts later I eventually found one that wasn't causing a problem and so was amenable to study. I was keen to find out about the structure of the roost and the behaviour of individuals. There was likely to be some order in the apparent chaos, and indeed there is. The squabbling and singing in the early evening is how the birds distribute themselves in the roost, so that by night-fall the centre of the roost has proportionately more adult males than the periphery and the periphery has proportionately more first-year females than the centre. Also, it is the heavier, fatter males that attain the centre and the leaner birds that are at the periphery. As the dominant birds are at the centre it suggests that the centre is the best place to be, and there are at least two ideas why this could be so. Firstly, the risk of predation, from owls and Sparrowhawks, is likely to be greater on the periphery of the roost and, secondly, it is perhaps warmer in the centre of the roost. It seems that the gregarious nature of Starlings does not bring equal (certainly not the same) benefits to all members of the society.

Massed departures

After the relative quietness of the night the singing and squabbling begins again at dawn as birds start to fly about within the roost and move to upper branches. This continues as the sky brightens and then, quite suddenly, there is a lull in the hubbub followed immediately by a mass exodus of part of the roost. The remaining birds start their clamour again and the cycle of silence and exodus is repeated. Massed departures follow at roughly three minute intervals until, after half an hour or so, the wood is empty. By day one can appreciate the signs of the sheer numbers that the wood supports; the stench of a deep carpet of droppings, the broken branches and occasional toppled tree. The strange exodus pattern of Starlings was first described by Professor Wynne-Edwards in the 1920's. Forty years later Dr Eastwood noted the exoduses appearing on radar screens as a number of expanding concentric circles; just like ripples on a pond when a stone has been dropped in. These rings travel outwards at a speed of 40 mph to the outer edge of the feeding range – 20-40 km away. Observations from the ground reveal that as an exodus passes a feeding site many birds quit the ring leaving others to carry on.

With the advent of small radio transmitters I was able to follow the behaviour of tagged starlings in these exoduses. Individuals tended to leave at much the same time each morning and adult males tended to leave before young females. Adults usually returned to the same feeding sites but young birds varied in their choice. So, why should the subordinate young birds, lighter and perhaps more hungry, allow the dominant ones to fly out first, and, presumably, choose the best feeding sites? Is it the case that young birds select a feeding site on the basis of potential competition they may face at a given site? Or is it the case that young birds allow adults to find feeding sites so they can join them later at these sites? The fact that some feeding sites have a predominance of adult males, whilst others have a predominance of young birds, suggests segregation rather than aggregation: ie. subordinates avoid dominants. Clearly, the social organisation at roost and feeding sites is based on an interaction between birds of different status. We now have a better idea what individuals do within this society but still have a long way to go in understanding why they do what they do.

Ron Summers

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
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Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to ***Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,*** *at the end of March, June, September and December. The period October to December is covered here.*

A superb three month period with two firsts and four seconds for Scotland, **Waxwing** and **Little Auk** invasions and a continuation of the **Crossbill** invasion. For many a **Waxwing** invasion so soon after the last one in 1988 was the highlight. Estimates suggest around 600 birds in Oct, 2600 in Nov and 2200 in Dec. Small numbers of **Little Auks** during Oct and Nov were totally eclipsed by the counts obtained during northerly gales in early Dec e.g. the exceptional count of 2300 off Girdle Ness on the 9th. Birds were present in the North Sea throughout the rest of that month.

October was an excellent month for rarities with, as so often, Shetland dominant. Orkney struck first with Scotland's third **White's Thrush** of the autumn on Stronsay on the 3rd though Shetland soon retaliated with Scotland's second ever **Ruppell's Warbler** on Whalsay. Another second for Scotland was the **Swainson's Thrush** which resided on Fair Isle from the 1st-6th, and yet another second for Scotland was an immature **Blackpoll Warbler** at Sumburgh on the 6th. Also on the northern isles were: 17 **Olive-backed Pipits**, at least 9 **Arctic Redpolls**, 7 **Little Buntings**, 3 **Short-toed Larks**, 3 **Dusky Warblers**, a **Lesser Grey Shrike**, **Greenish Warbler** and **Parrot Crossbill** all on Whalsay, a **Two-barred Crossbill**, **Rustic Bunting** and **Red-throated Pipit** all on Fair Isle, **Ortolan Bunting** and **Red-rumped Swallow** on North Ronaldsay, and an **Arctic Warbler** on Unst (much to the delight of the previous compiler of this column, I'm sure).

Rarities did turn up elsewhere during Oct notably the **Solitary Sandpiper** on North Uist on the 20th; the only previous Scottish record being in Lanarkshire last century. Also on the Uists were signle **Melodious** and **Icterine Warblers**, a **Little Bunting**, **Arctic Redpoll** and up to 3 **Rough-legged Buzzards**.

From about the 28th to the end of Oct east to south east winds produced a classic east coast autumn for passerines. The only **Olive-backed Pipit** away from the northern isles was at Cruden Bay whilst Lothian's first **Radde's Warbler** was at Barns Ness, 2 **Red-rumped Swallows** were at Tyninghame and a juvenile **Rose-coloured Starling** at Crail. From Shetland to the Borders there were at least 21 **Yellow-browed Warblers**, 8 **Great Grey Shrikes**, 9 **Barred Warblers**, 2 **Red-backed Shrikes**, 6 **Firecrests**, 2 **Common Rosefinches**, 8 **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, 3 **Siberian Stonechats**, 9 **Richard's Pipits** and single **Wryneck**, **Marsh Warbler**, **Golden Oriole** and **Bluethroat**. The 10 **Pallas' Warblers** including a west coast record from Dornie in Ross. Thousands of **thrushes** were also involved and a record count of 100 **Chiffchaffs** on Fair Isle on the 18th.

Rare waders came in the form of a juvenile **American Golden Plover** at Barassie on the 7th, Ayrshire's second, a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at Caerlaverock which duly wintered, the second one to do so there in the last ten years, and 10 **Grey Phalaropes**, all in the Uists except one at the Ythan.

Waxwing *David Gowans*

Ring-necked Ducks were at Dalmellington and Hule Moss in Berwickshire, a drake **Ferruginous Duck** at Penicuik, drake **Red-crested Pochards** in Fife and Caithness and single **Surf Scoters** at Burghead and St. Andrews. Higher numbers of **Pink-footed Geese** in late October were accompanied by as many as 12 records of **Snow Geese**, all white phase birds from Morayshire to Fife.

A **Gull-billed Tern** was at Loch Ryan with 2 **Sabine's Gulls** off Corsewall Point and 4 **Mediterranean Gulls** at Dunbar, Hound Point, Barassie and the Donmouth. **Long tailed Skuas** were only reported from Hound Point, peaking at 5. **Pomarine Skuas** peaked there at 25 on 22 Oct. Further October oddities included a **dark breasted Barn Owl** on Orkney and a **Chough** at Crail airfield, potentially a first record for the Scottish east coast this century.

Scotland's first and Britain's second **Yellow Warbler** was in a Lerwick garden from 3-4 Nov. This bird would almost certainly have made an earlier landfall somewhere to the north and east. **American Wigeon** returned to Vane Farm, Stenhouse Reservoir in Fife and Gladhouse Reservoir. Single **Surf Scoters** were at Burghead, Findhorn and the Culbin Bar and up to 4 were at Musselburgh from 15 Dec. The usual drake **King Eiders** were in Shetland, Aberdeenshire and Fife. More unusual were single **Leach's Petrel** off Corsewall Pt on 18 Nov, **Avocets** at Tyninghame and near Annan, a **black-bellied Dipper** on Shetland, a wintering **Firecrest** in Sutherland and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** at Greenock in Nov.

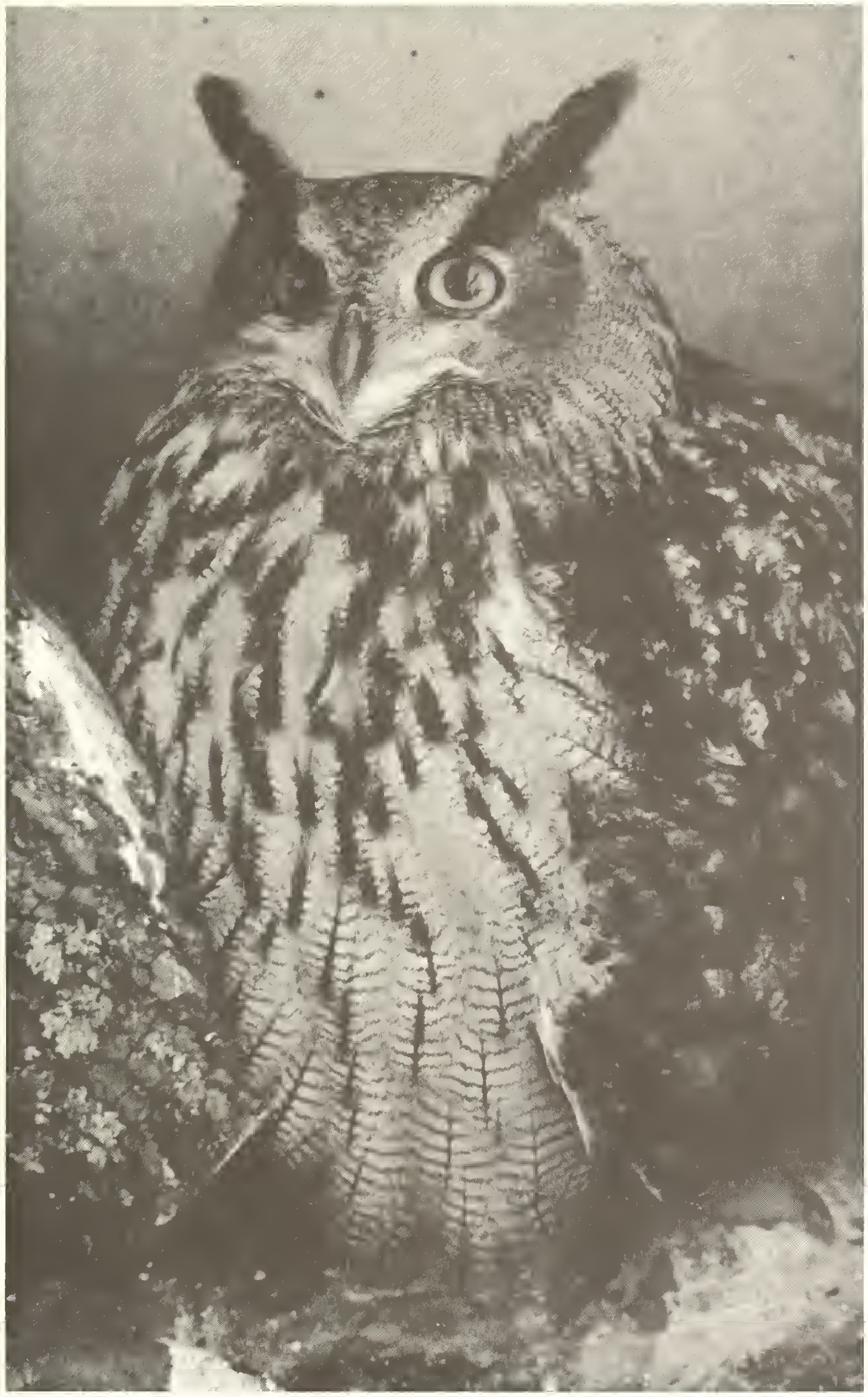
There were about 11 reports of widely scattered **Smew** and 4 **small Canada Geese** in Perthshire, Islay and at Caerlaverock and 7 wintering **Green Sandpipers**.

Totals of c.40 **Glaucous** and c.20 **Iceland Gulls** were nice for early winter. 144 **Bean Geese** at Fannyside Loch on 25 Nov as one of the few records of the elusive central Scotland flock.

The intriguing record of a dead **Little Shearwater** at Musselburgh on 9 Dec will only be Scotland's 4th. A first winter **Ivory Gull** was at Lerwick from 10 Dec, a drake **Red-crested Pochard** at St. Abbs Head, **Ring-necked Ducks** at Loch Morlich and Milton Lodge, Kirkcudbright and a **Hoopoe** was at Nairn from 23-25 Dec. The final rarity of a fascinating period appeared on Milton Loch where Scotland's first **Lesser Scaup** was found on 29 Dec to be relocated on nearby Auchenreoch Loch in the New Year.

Angus Murray

Many of the above reports were obtained from records phoned into Birdline Scotland, a commercial information service for Scottish birdwatchers. The Birdline Scotland number is ***0898 700234*** *(calls charged at 33p per min. cheap rate and 44p per min at all other times inclusive of V.A.T.). Any news can be phoned into the hotline number* ***0292 611994*** *(24 hour answerphone service); all relevant information will be passed to appropriate bodies.*



An interesting story lies behind Sam Alexander's photograph of an Eagle Owl. The bird was picked up with a dislocated shoulder joint on 27 January 1990 in the Highlands by a shooter. It may have flown into something the previous night which was stormy. It was said to have been living in a barn for about a year before its accident and fending successfully for itself. The owl was taken to Aberdeen University's Culterty Field Station where Sandy Anderson, Grampian Branch stalwart and newly installed Chairman of the SOC's Editorial Committee, force fed it for a week. This seemed to help the bird which was pssed into the care of a veterinary surgeon. Sandy hopes to place the bird in a captive breeding programme. The bird was unringed and may have been the offspring of birds we know were released in the Highlands. Although widespread throughout Europe Eagle Owls are declining in most parts of their range, except where special protection measures and/or reintroduction schemes have boosted their numbers. They are not difficult to breed in captivity so it is not surprising that some have been released in Britain. Eagle Owls are certainly impressive birds, bigger than Buzzards. Their prey can be as large as herons, Capercaillie, foxes and young deer. Other predators are often killed including other owls. Although Eagle Owls would be exciting additions to the Scottish avifauna they could have a detrimental effect on local populations of smaller owls which would be vulnerable as they hunt conspicuously along forest edges at night.

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Reviews

Man and Wildfowl *J Kear; Poyser, 1990; 288 pp; many illustrations and diagrams; £17.*
Birds by Night *G Martin; Poyser, 1990; 227 pp; line-drawings and diagrams; £18.*

The stable may have changed ownership but the line of impeccable thoroughbreds remains unbroken. These two latest offerings under the Poyser imprint are in some ways very different but both maintain the high standard we have come to expect. Janet Kear's book covers virtually everything in the long history of interaction between man and swans, geese and ducks; in fact, the only possible criticism would be that this vast field is too wide-ranging to be accommodated in 288 pages. Nevertheless, Dr Kear succeeds in doing precisely that, and, thanks to uniting an elegant style with painstaking research, has produced a book of equal interest to the specialist and the intelligent layman. Equally at home in different disciplines, she ranges from Celtic duck representations in the 5th century BC to the introduction to Europe of the Ruddy Duck, from vivid images of mediaeval tar-shod geese plodding their way between Suffolk and the London markets to speculation about the genetic finger-printing of isolated island wildfowl populations. A *tour de force*.

Birds by Night might be less accessible to the non-ornithologist, but it is by no means limited in appeal to the owl-fanatic. While obviously much attention is devoted to the more crepescular and nocturnal species, perhaps themost thought provoking elements of the book discuss the question of what constitutes "night" and examine the occasional nocturnal activity of normally diurnal birds. If this were not enough, the beautiful illustrations by John Busby, which are a prominent feature of our North Berwick conference, would make the book worth the money for themselves alone.

Michael Murphy

Birds to watch: *the ICBP world checklist of threatened birds; N J C Collar and P Andrew; ICBP Technical Publication No 8. 1988; 303 pp.*

World checklist of threatened birds; *compiled by John Norton, Simon Stuart and Tim Johnson; NCC. 1990; 274 pp; £20.00.*

If you are looking for a good read or lavish illustrations do not buy either of these books. They are, as their titles indicate, checklists of information on threatened birds. Both are valuable works of reference.

Birds to Watch is a compendium of the available information on the status of over one thousand bird species (11% of the world total of 9,000) that are believed to be threatened with global extinction. The authors do not agonise about the definition of a threatened bird, which is just as well in view of the dearth of reliable data on many of the species likely to be in immediate danger of extinction. A digest of information on numbers, population trends and threats is presented for each species, arranged in a systematic list. The species accounts are brief, averaging six species per page. The treatment is intended to be complementary to that in the international bird Red Data Book in giving a less detailed account, but with the advantage that this book has been produced and can be revised in a much shorter time so its information will be more up to date. This is an important virtue given the rapidity with which important bird habitats are being destroyed worldwide.

In addition to the systematic list there is a useful appendix giving threatened species lists for "geopolitical units". Scotland does not count as one of these, but the three threatened species listed for the United Kingdom (Corncrake, White-tailed Eage and Red Kite) all occur here, albeit as declining or recently re-introduced birds. A further appendix gives a list of species regarded as being near-threatened. The reference list is a valuable guide to further information.

The World checklist of threatened birds is the second edition of a book giving information on the legal status of 2,200 bird species including those covered by the international convention on trade in endangered species and all of those listed in Birds to Watch. It consists of a systematic list which gives the status of the species under the CITES Convention, its category of threat in the IUCN Red List, the forms of trade and exploitation by humans to which it is subject and a list of the countries in which it occurs. The main purpose of the book is to be an authoritative source for those responsible for issuing licences to import or export birds.

Rhys Green

Barn Owl *Bobby Smith*

The Curlew *by Gerry Cotter; Shire 1990; 24pp; figures and colour photographs; £1.95.*

Unlike some other waders, such as the Oyster-catcher, the Curlew is not a well studied species despite the fact it is a common bird. However, Gerry Cotter has brought together much of the available information in an attractive booklet. The text deals with all aspects of the annual cycle and biology of the curlew in a highly readable manner, and is spiced with occasional anecdotes and quaint interpretations. The photographs are good and include behavioural shots as well as portraits.

R W Summers

The Bird-Watcher's Yearbook *edited by J E Pemberton; Buckingham Press; 1990; 320 pp; £9.50.*

The 1991 edition of this annual publication lives up to the high standards set by its predecessors. In addition to the usual mass of invaluable information on reserves, organisations and individuals, the features section this year includes an article of Scottish interest in the shape of a contribution on the North Sea Bird Club.

Michael Murphy

The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Birds; *by Christopher Perrins (consultant-in-chief); Headline Books of London, in association with the KBP; 1990; 420 pp; 29 × 22 cm; £30.00.*

There have been a number of encyclopaedias of birds published over the years, but this is the first to keep to a strict species-order approach. More than 1200 species of the world's birds are described and drawn in colour, with representatives from each of the world's 176 bird families. The drawings are superb, a tribute to the 19 artists and to modern colour-printing techniques. The texts, contributed by a total of 44 authors, immediately follow each double page of paintings of the birds, giving geographical range, habitat, special mention of threatened species, and good general information. It is a good arrangement and the texts are models of clarity. Finally there is a complete list of the world's 9300 bird species (based on Howard and Moore's *Complete Checklist of Birds of the World* 1990 edition) arranged in order and family, with indications of geographical range and conservation status. At £30 this really is very good value.

William Harper

Nearctic Gulls in the W. Palearctic by *W Hoegendoorn & G H Steinhaus; 1990; 56 pp; obtainable from Dutch Birding Association, Postbus 75611, 1070AP Amsterdam; Neth G 10.00.*

This is a compilation of virtually all available information on vagrancy to the W Palearctic up to the end of 1987 of four Nearctic species: Ring-billed, Laughing, Franklin's and Bonaparte's Gulls. All sightings are listed, with the exception of the 401 Ring-bills in Britain and Ireland. In addition to a comprehensive analysis of these data, the authors speculate on the reasons behind the apparently inconsistent vagrancy of these gulls, given their relative numbers "at home", establishing a frequency ration in Europe of Ring-billed 25: Laughing 4: Franklin's 3: Bonaparte's 8. Illustrated with many colour photographs, maps, diagrams and tables, this slim volume packs more reliable and valuable information into its 56 pages than many books four times its size. An excellent buy.

Michael Murphy

Managing Waterfowl Populations *G V T Matthews (ed); IWRB Special Publication No 12 1990; 230 pp; numerous tables and diagrams; £12.*

An extremely interesting series of papers, this publication deals with a wide range of wildfowl-orientated topics: distribution and status, shooting statistics, management, controlling factors other than shooting, and the conservation of threatened species. While it is not surprising that much attention is centred on the USSR, the approach is in fact global, with particularly interesting discussion on the decline of White-fronted Geese wintering in Central Europe and on the increase in Canada Geese in Britain and Scandinavia.

Michael Murphy

Expansion et Regression des Espèces *edited by J-P Jacob & E Clotuche; Actes du Colloque International d'Ornithologie, Liège 19-20 November 1988. Special issue of 'Aves' Vol 26, 1989.*

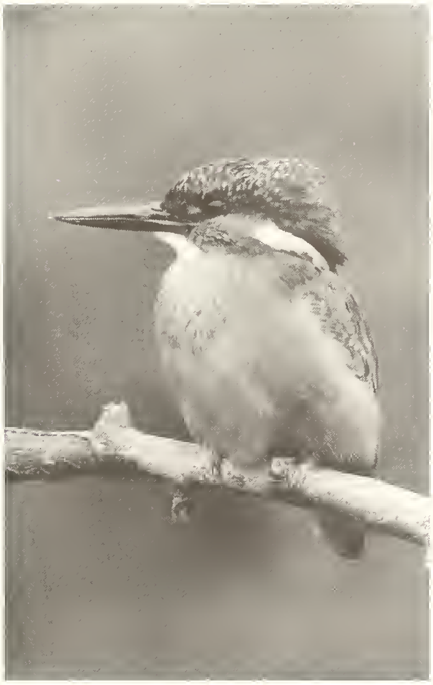
This collection of papers, published to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of *Aves*, is devoted to a discussion of the expansion and regression of various species throughout Europe, although the majority of articles concentrate on Belgium and the Low Countries. Approximately half the papers discuss the theme of population dynamics and the factors affecting them in general, while the remainder are devoted to individual species. Among those treated, owls figure large: Tengmalm's, Eagle, Little and Barn with no fewer than three separate articles dealing with the last-named. Also featured are, however, among others, Black Stork, Goshawk (with its interaction with Buzzard), Little Tern, Kingfisher, Icterine Warbler and, perhaps most hearteningly of all, an account of an extraordinary comeback staged by the Corncrake on a military training area in Belgium. Can we persuade a few of the remnant heading for the Hebrides to have a look at Salisbury Plain en route? Needless to say, almost the whole of the collection is in French; to those not automatically switched off by this fact, there is a wealth of fascinating material to be found in this book.

Michael Murphy

Merlin alarm calling in winter

Around midday on 28 January 1990 in a glen on Deeside, Grampian, we walked through a regularly used Merlin nesting area and saw an adult male Merlin. We were surprised to have seen a Merlin because the moor was under six inches of snow and devoid of potential prey. It flew around in an agitated manner while alarm calling then settled for a minute before again flying around alarm calling. It then flew down the glen towards a neighbouring nesting area. Its behaviour was reminiscent of nest defense, but breeding at this site was three months away. BWP2 states that Merlins are usually silent away from the nest, the exception being at a communal winter roost (*SB* 7: 288-292). More recently one was heard calling over Edinburgh in autumn (*SB* 13: 188-189). As far as we know the area did not hold a communal roost and we were not aware of any other animal which could have activated this behaviour.

Graham Rebecca and Keith Duncan



Kingfisher *Bobby Smith*

BRISC: Kingfisher Survey 1991-92

This has come about because of contact with an English County Trust, who are conducting a similar survey and who would appreciate comparable studies elsewhere. This entails the recording of all sightings throughout a two year period. All interested birdwatchers in Scotland are invited to send sight records to the **BRISC co-ordinator, c/o SWT, 25 Johnston Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2NH.**

Brief research by myself has shown that Kingfishers were recorded as part of a BTO Sawbill survey some years ago; this has not been processed yet. Atlas work has covered the species in winter and summer. Detailed work has been carried out in the Glasgow area, but no all year round recording, nationally, has occurred. In this area of Tayside sightings are becoming more frequent, especially in spring and autumn.

Stephen Fulford

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Johan G. van Rhijn

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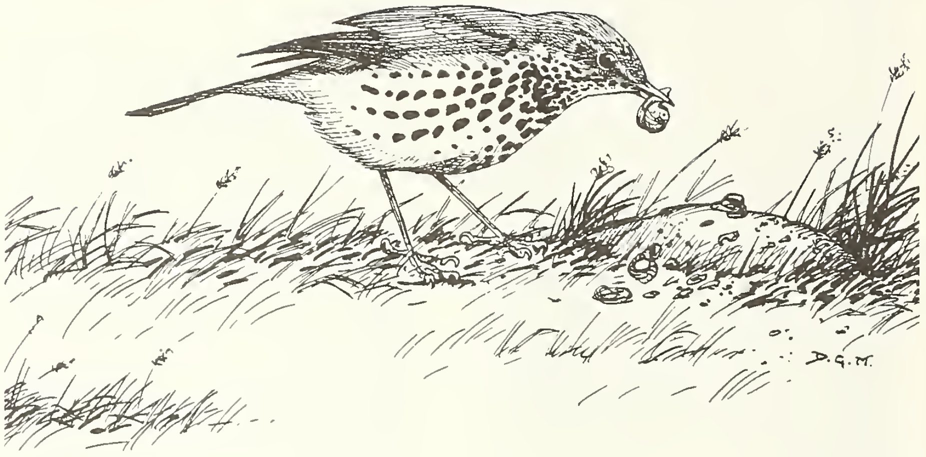

Song Thrush *David Mitchell*

Scottish Ringers 1990

For some years I had heard rave reviews of the Ringers' Conference at Braemar and, much intrigued, resolved to actually attend. I did wonder what the accommodation must be like when a price of £42 was quoted, inclusive of full board and conference fee. Was it located in a bothy halfway up a hillside, or some damp and draughty hostel, reminiscent of a prisoner-of-war camp but nevertheless absolutely suited to the wildmen of Scottish birding?

The Fife Arms Hotel turned out to be one of those vast Baronial Gothic hotels built in the Highlands to accommodate hordes of hunting parties out to emulate Queen Victoria and her family during the last century. Needless to say it provided splendid accommodation, wonderful food and an ideal backdrop to an enjoyable weekend.

Geordie invasion

Saturday morning witnessed an invasion of Geordies. Philip Whitfield opened proceedings with an account of the breeding waders at one of the "hot spots" of glacier covered Ellesmere Island in northern Canada. He outlined the factors contributing to habitat differentiation between breeding Knot, Turnstone and Baird's Sandpiper. His intimate photos of Knot on the humpy tundra and his accounts of the display were particularly stimulating. Another tundra species, the Brent Goose, was examined on the Lindisfarne wintering grounds by Steve Percival. He was able to account for recent increases there, relating them to the amount and quality of the two species of Eel Grass that grow on the mudflats. Allan Brown then gave some results from a lengthy study of Mute Swans in the Lothians which has involved ringing nearly 1,000 birds. This study has blown away the myth that Mute Swans are mainly resident, some birds being involved in complicated movements of hundreds of kilometres up and down the east coast and its major rivers.

After coffee Nigel Clark gave us details of the implications of building a tidal-barrage scheme on the Severn. The probable outcome was, surprisingly, not all doom and gloom. It may be possible, considering the vast amount of cash involved in such a scheme, to allocate a tiny proportion (but still many millions) to habitat management that could compensate for the lost estuarine feeding. Jeremy Wilson concluded the session with an account of young Dipper dispersal on the Lothian Esk confirming ideas of sexual differences in the degree of dispersal.

Twitching ringers

Lunch was followed by the spectacle of ringers twitching the local specialities: Capercaillie, Ptarmigan, Golden Eagle and Crossbill. No-one claimed Scottish Crossbill perhaps because they were unable to handle them!

Dave Dick of the RSPB then told us something of the uphill struggle to boost Scotland's Peregrine population. He observed that it was not only our morning speakers that had a preponderance of Geordies but also amongst some of the characters that he met with professionally. While many birders and eggers disperse northwards from the environs of South Shields the same thing could not be said for Tony Fox's Greenland White-fronts. Colour ringing had revealed an amazing degree of site faithfulness which perhaps had contributed to its former decline in the face of habitat destruction on the wintering grounds. He revealed that juveniles wintered with their parents for as many as five or six years after hatching; geese with an Oedipus complex!

Steve Baillie of the BTO then displayed what it was possible to do by integrating all of the various strands of the BTO database. The CBC, WBS, Nest Record Scheme and Ringing Scheme all had threads of information that could be teased out to provide insights into what factors were affecting population levels of species. It was unfortunate that he chose Song Thrush to demonstrate this integrated monitoring as he was still unable to explain what had caused the raised mortality in first year birds since 1978.

What was clearly the traditional BTO-bashing session followed as the ringers were given the chance to ask the Beech Grove staff about ring prices and delays. The highlight of this was Jacquie Clark valiantly fending off vociferous complaints from one especially disgruntled ringer about the BTO policy of only supplying nets from manufacturers not involved in commercial bird trapping and liming in the Far East.

Resurrecting the dead

Martin Moss had the dubious privilege of resurrecting the dead on Sunday morning. In an effort not to tax the neurones that had survived the previous night's session in the bar, he chose to show slides of wader netting in Northwest Australia. His pretence that the tank of liquid nitrogen was used to keep fecal samples cool cut little ice with those who probably correctly interpreted that it was really there to chill the Fosters and Castlemaine XXXX in 40°C temperatures!

Geoff Shaw produced some wonderfully colourful overheads to grab our attention in his talk on Barn Owls using nest boxes in the southwest. The population boost that followed box provision was spectacular and made one wonder where young birds went prior to the creation of so many new nest sites. Blatant oneupmanship followed in Ken Bruce's account of breeding Cormorants on the Solway. The nest box provided here, on an old bomb target platform, held a colony of over 30 pairs of Cormorants! The last speaker was Jim Reid who displayed some of the preliminary maps from the first two years of the BTO/SOC Atlas. He mainly dealt with moorland species and, while many maps were generally similar to the previous Atlas, it was the small differences that raised questions that he hoped would be answered before publication.

The Conference certainly lived up to the word of mouth publicity and the Lothian (Northumberland) Ringing Group is to be congratulated for providing an often witty and entertaining group of speakers at an excellent venue. The conference finished with the unlikely arrival of 20 bus loads of Cliff Richard fans for lunch in the hotel, refuting what many thought was a wind up on the part of Ian Poxton and Alan Heavisides!

Ray Murray

Male Osprey bringing trout to his mate
Don Smith

Operation Osprey is looking for volunteer helpers especially cooks! Contact Andy Amphlett at ***RSPB, Grampian, Nethybridge, Inverness-shire, PH2 53F. Tel Boat of Garten (047 983) 694.***

Colour-marked Oystercatchers and Redshanks

231 Redshanks were caught, ringed, dyed yellow on the under tail coverts (behind the legs, on the underside to the tail) and released on 21 September 1990. 254 Oystercatchers were caught ringed, dyed yellow on the under tail coverts (behind the legs, on the underside to the tail) and released on 22 September 1990. This exercise was carried out as part of a study of feeding behaviour of these birds on the mudflats of Belfast Lough, by North Down Ringing Group on behalf of the Countryside and Wildlife Branch DoE (NI). We know from our ringing records that a number of the Oystercatchers wintering on Belfast Lough breed in the Western Isles, Highland Region, and Shetland in Scotland, also on the Faroes and in Iceland. Any sightings of these dye-marked birds around Belfast Lough or elsewhere, will be very welcome. The farthest sighting of a colour-marked Oystercatcher from a previous dyeing exercise was in Highland Region, near Inverness. All reports of sightings will be acknowledged. Please send any sightings to: **Ian Forsyth, 24 Malone Park, Belfast BT9 6NJ, tel: (0232) 245133 ext 3326; or (0232) 665534.**

Special issue of Die Vogelwarte

A special issue of Volume 36 will be published in mid 1991 with the title: **Autumn Migration, Resting Behaviour, Biometry and Moult of Small Birds in Central Europe**. The issue will contain full-page diagrams of the data from 37 passerine species which were systematically investigated in the MRI-Program. The graphs represent mean values for Mettnau, Reit and Illmitz over a ten-year period from more than 1/4 million individual birds. The graphs portray the autumn migratory period from June to November for each species and station. The issue provides a first overview of departure and passage migration in small birds including their biology in Central Europe which was based on a strictly standardized trapping program. The graphs are explained and complemented by short English and German summaries. Size approx. 200 pages, price about 30 DM. This special issue will *not* automatically be sent to members of the Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft but *must be ordered on account* from the publisher at **Verlagstruckerei Schmidt GmbH. Nürnberger StraBe 27-31, 8530 Neustadt a. d. Aisch, Germany**. Delivery of the issue will be around the middle of 1991.

Small falcons conference

The first of its kind, this international conference on 'Biology and Conservation of Small Falcons' organised by the Hawk and Owl Trust is to be held at the **University of Kent, Canterbury, UK on 6-8 September 1991**. It has attracted a wide range of speakers from all over the world. Registration details from **Fiona Swingland, DICE, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NY.** Offers of poster papers, contributions to workshops etc to **Dr M. Nicholls, Christchurch College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU.**

Russian bird counts

The Soviet programme of Winter Bird Counts *Parus* started in 1985 and is analogous to European and American Christmas Bird Counts. Our counts are carried out on line transects, in different forest types in December-February. Every year we investigate 34-40 permanent count points, placed in all climate and vegetation zones of the European Part of the USSR from 68°N to 42°N and from 24°E to 60°E. We ask for help in our search for contacts with the organizers of similar research programmes in your region. We want to co-ordinate our plans, methods and publications. We also want to create an all European research programme, not only during winter, but in the breeding season too. **Dr A Bogolyubov, All-Union Research Institute of Nature Conservation and Reserves, Sudki-Znamenskoye, M-628, 113628, Moscow, USSR.**

Wilf Nelson Rhum Bursary

On 14 September 1989 Wilf Nelson suffered a fatal fall while carrying out routine survy work as NCC warden on the Island of Rhum NNR. Wilf had already contributed a great deal to nature conservation, both on Rhum and elsewhere, in his short career and such was the widespread feeling of loss amongst his many friends and colleagues that a memorial fund was established. This fund, which is still open for donations, now stands at around £6,000 and with the support of Wilf's widow, Rosemary, it was decided to establish a Bursary which will be used to support small research/survey projects centred on Rhum.

Applications for financial support are therefore invited for individual projects to be carried out during 1991. Preference will be given to studies on the natural environment of Rhum, particularly its wildlife, but consideration will also be given to projects dealing with conservation management, including education and intepretation. It seems likely that around £500 will be available for dispensing during 1991. A brief summary of the project proposal and estimated costs should be sent initially to the **Chief Warden, Rhum** and should arrive by 31 March 1991.

SOC Notices

Scottish Birds

We are very pleased to announce that Anne-Marie Smout, who will already be known to Fife members for her work on the birds of the Kingdom, has taken on the editorship of the Club's journal. A new editorial panel is being formed; so far Prof Peter Slater and Dr David Jenkins have kindly agreed to serve on it. We wish the new team well and remind authors that papers and notes are welcome now for the 1991 issue. Send them c/o 21 Regent Terrace.

Scottish Bird News

Now things are more settled in the Club's premises Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy will be jointly editing the magazine. This will allow SdP to enjoy life without SOC deadlines in his diary for the first time in 11 years. Mike Ashley will also be finishing as an assistant editor but will continue to contribute artwork. Members, and especially branches, can help the magazine by contributing. Don't hold back because you aren't sure if your piece is of interest to others. Send it in and see what the editors make of it. We are keen to get better coverage of conservation issues throughout Scotland as well as more articles on good places to see birds. More humour would not go amiss either.

Scottish Bird Report

All concerned are dismayed to have to announce that the 1989 SBR will not be ready to go out with this mailing as promised. Some data has still not reached the SBR editor. Council will discuss the situation at its March meeting. To compensate SBN will continue to come out with a minimum of 16 pages per quarter. When first planned SBN was reckoned to need about 8 pages though it has never appeared with less than 12 and this issue has 20.

Fund raising

Most members will have suffered the annoyance of collecting coupons from different petrol stations yet never gaining enough to apply for a gift. So why not follow the example of John Childs of Lothian Branch who collects them from members on behalf of the branch and then organises a raffle of the communal booty?

Dennis of Arabia

Roy Dennis, for years RSPB's Highland Officer, has left the Society to work freelance – and tend his croft. His first project has been to look at the oil pollution in the Persian Gulf and help formulate a strategy to ensure the survival of key habitats and bird populations.

Thanks

The December SBN was packed in two days thanks to Peter Gordon, Hetty Harper, Rosemary Davidson, Trevor Smith, Paul Speak, John Hardey, Brenda & Mervyn Griffin, Calum Scott, Mark Darling, Keith Chapman, Stan Abel and Ruaraidh Hamilton. Thanks also to Mark Holling for further computing help and Bob Smith for more woodwork.

Change of recorder for St Kilda

Tim Dix of **2 Dreumasdal, S. Uist**, has taken over responsibility as Recorder for St Kilda from Peter Cunningham whom we thank for his contribution.

New recorder for Dumfries

Edmund Fellowes has retired, no doubt to spend even more time taking the excellent photographs for which he and his colleagues in the south west are renowned, and which the editors hope will continue to feature in SBN. His successor is **Ken Bruce, Mallaig, Wellington Street, Glencaple, Dumfries DG1 2RA. Tel. Glencaple 336.**

Visits to branches

I would like to thank all the branches I have visited over the winter for their hospitality. Meeting members is undoubtedly one of the more enjoyable things about working for the SOC. If I didn't make it to your branch in 1990-91 I certainly hope to in 1991-92.

Sylvia Laing, Membership Secretary

200 Club success

At the time of writing (December) we have almost 150 members, and prizes were increased from November. The following were the winners in the last quarter of 1990:
October 1st: £20 – Mrs J.F.S. Martin, Granton-on-Spey; 2nd: £10 – R.S. Smith, Plymouth.
November 1st: £50 – Miss M.H. Knox, Edinburgh; 2nd: £30 – Mrs M. Macintyre, St. Andrews; 3rd: £20 – A.G.S. Bryson, Edinburgh; 4th: £10 – Mr & Mrs R.R. Burn, East Kilbride.
December 1st: £30 – K.J. Lee, Aberdeen; 2nd: £20 – Miss S Laing, Perth; 3rd: £10 – J.C. Jackson, Chester.

On 30 May we reach the end of the 200 Club's second year during which we have bought a roller blind for the main office and a mini electric stove for the staff and visitors' use; repainted the kitchen and carpeted it; and made a contribution towards carpeting the hall, all of which has cost over £700. At the same time we have given out £670 in prizes. This is a tremendous help to the SOC and has brought welcome prizes to members. Renewal notices will be sent out to existing members shortly, but those wishing to join should either send a cheque for £12.00 (payable to 'SOC 200 Club') to me, or write and ask for a Banker's Order form. Remember, when we have 200 members, there will be £1200 for SOC refurbishment and a similar sum for prizes. I look forward to hearing from you at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. Melrose (089 682) 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Small ads

ANGUS AND DUNDEE BIRD REPORT 1988 & 1989 Available at £3.00 from 21 Regent Terrace or by post at £3.25 from **Martin Scott, 33 John Street, Arbroath, Angus DD11 1BT Tel: (0241) 74166.** Includes a paper on the Dipper in Angus and covers two years.

HEBRIDEAN BIRD REPORT 1986/88 – Now available as an offprint from Hebridean Naturalist 10, from **Peter Cunningham, "Aros" 10 Barony Square, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis PA87 2TQ.** Price £1.00 inc. postage.

WESTERN ISLES BIRD REPORT. Full reports of 1989 and 1990, monthly tables of less common migrants and rarities, descriptions including Long-toed Stint and Solitary Sandpiper, article on 1989 and 1990 Grey Phalarope influxes. This and more at the pre-publication price (publishing May) of £3 inc. p&p. Only 500 being produced – so order now! **from Tim Dix at 2 Dreumasdal, South Uist PA81 5RT.**

JOURNALS FOR SALE Bird Study 77-86; British Birds 81-84; Ibis 86-89 **Alan Graham, tel: 031-663 5944.**

Sales Items

SOC Sweatshirt Navy with pocket-size SOC logo. Small, Medium, Large and Ex Large.	£10.50
SOC Ties Polyester with repeat SOC motif. Navy, Maroon, Drk Green & Drk Brown.	£5.95
SOC Badge Enamelled metal lapel badge. New reduced price.	£2.00
SOC Car Sticker Plastic, self-adhesive SOC motif.	£ .75
SOC Fieldlist A pocket-sized checklist of all species regularly occurring in Scotland. New reduced price.	£ .50
SOC Checklist An annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. New reduced price.	£ 1.00

All prices include post and packing (except overseas – add £1.50) **SOC (Sales) 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 5042).**

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:
Adult £12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00
Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC
Printed by Ritchie of Edinburgh, 163 Bonnington Road, Edinburgh EH6 5RE

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

JUNE 1991 No. 22
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Sylvia Laing, Michael Murphy and Kate Thompson

AUG 8 1991
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Power cable casualties in the Clyde Valley

One rather obtrusive if familiar feature of our modern landscape are lines of pylons carrying high voltage power cables. In locations where these cross traditionally used wildfowl flight paths some of our most beautiful birds may pay a high price for our convenience. Iain English has found that the scale of this problem at just one site in the Clyde Valley gives cause for concern.

Merryton and Carbarns lie immediately upriver of the Barons Haugh RSPB reserve near Motherwell. Both areas are recognised as excellent localities for wildfowl and waders which are attracted to a network of small ponds, flooded fields and pastures.

Each winter this area attracts substantial numbers of whooper and mute swans. Frequently, over sixty whoopers have been in attendance, marking this locality as a nationally important site for this species. Carbarns is particularly favoured by the swans owing to its grazing potential. The birds regularly commute to Barons Haugh and further afield to Strathclyde Park from this favoured haunt. Other wildfowl and large birds such as herons, cormorants and gulls have been regularly observed commuting between these areas or simply flying up and down the valley.

The major concern is power cables suspended from towering pylons which run from Netherton in Motherwell (grid ref. NS 765545) across the valley to Ferniegair near Larkhall (grid ref. NS 761543), thus dividing Merryton and Carbarns from Barons Haugh.

These pose a potential danger to larger birds, although the risk in diurnal flight is small unless the prevailing weather conditions reduce visibility. The serious danger arises during the hours of darkness when the power cables are undetectable. Swans in particular require a good run before lifting off, whether from land or water. The power cables are very close to Carbarns so that by the time the swans lift off they are level with the cables. This leads to deaths on the ground from multiple injuries sustained in colliding with the cables.

A search on a day in late January this year revealed five overnight fatalities: a juvenile whooper swan with injuries to shoulder and wing found about 60 yards from the pylons, a lesser black-backed gull, a black-headed gull and a curlew. A distressed heron was also found with badly damaged legs. Initially thought to have been shot, veterinary examination revealed that the injuries sustained were more likely to have been from a collision with the cables. Unfortunately, it was necessary to put the bird down.

A similar incident was discovered on 3rd October 1990. I located the impact spot marked by a multitude of feathers and then followed a trail of body feathers for at least 25 yards to the river bank. The bird was not found but was presumably a mute swan as no whoopers were yet in the area. In 1971, I had found a dead whooper swan beneath the same cables. In 1990 the site was regularly monitored and the following dead birds found:

Whooper Swan *Stan da Prato*

Mute swan	7	Whooper swan	4
Mallard	4	Teal	3
Pochard	1	Goosander	1
Cormorant	1	Herring gull	1
B-H gull	2	L B-B gull	2
Carrion crow	1	Rook	1
Curlew	2	Woodpigeon	1
Redwing	1	Coot	1

Some other birds were undoubtedly not detected due to scavenging foxes and carcasses being washed away during periodic flooding of the river banks. However, the numbers of casualties actually found are alarming in their own right. Any estimate of the total casualties over the years back to my original discovery in 1971 could only be described as horrendous.

The matter has been raised with the Planning Officer of Scottish Power at the Baillieston (Glasgow) office. An on-site meeting was held on 25th July 1990 to discuss the problems. While understanding my concern, he could not foresee any immediate solution. Earth cables could be marked but all cables pose a threat to birds at night and marking the main cables would apparently create havoc with local television sets!

The Planning Officer stated that Scottish Power could only consider action to resolve this problem if provided with supporting statistics. Inevitably, this means that casualties will need to be monitored for some time to come. The above casualties list has been forwarded to Scottish Power with an assurance that statistics will continue to be gathered and that conservation agencies would be notified accordingly.

The casualty list for 1991 to mid February was as follows:

Whooper swan	2	Wigeon	2
Teal	2	Mallard	1
Duck Sp.	1	Coot	1
Heron	1	Herring gull	1
B-H gull	1	L B-B gull	1

Anyone wishing to assist with monitoring the site or requiring further details can contact me at: **21 Grant Court, Avon Grove, Hamilton, Strathclyde ML3 7UT.**

Iain English

Editor's note: a similar incident was recently reported by James O'Hagan writing in The Scotsman. An immature mute swan, which had been ringed as a fledgling on Dunsapie Loch in Edinburgh in 1989, collided with power cables near the Union Canal earlier this year.

Wildlife and the law

Earlier this year, the Angus and Dundee Branch of the Scottish Wildlife Trust organised a seminar called Wildlife and the Law which focused on the content and implementation of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. This Act has been the main plank of statutory provisions for species and habitat conservation in the UK over the past ten years and has attracted considerable amounts of both praise and criticism. The SWT seminar provided a useful opportunity to learn something of the on-the-ground experiences of those whose job is to implement it.

The Act is divided into several sections, but the following relates only to section 1 which deals with species protection. Richard Ninnes and John Young, both of the NCC, outlined the provisions which the Act makes for species protection. All wild flowers are protected to the extent that they may not be uprooted except with the consent of the landowner. In addition over 90 endangered plants, listed on Schedule 8, are afforded complete protection. Wild animals, defined as all invertebrates and vertebrates excluding birds, are not given any general protection, although certain methods of killing such as crossbows are prohibited. Certain other methods of killing such as gassing are prohibited for species listed on Schedule 6 which includes such animals as badgers and pine martens. Endangered species, listed in Schedule 5, cannot legally be killed, injured, taken, traded or, in most cases, disturbed or have their shelter damaged without licenses from DAFS, which may be issued if damage is being caused to crops etc. The NCC may also issue licences to permit research work on these animals.

As explained by David Morgan, the NCC's Species Advisor, Schedules 5 and 8 are subject to statutory review every 5 years. Species can only be added to the schedules if "in danger of extinction in Great Britain or likely to become so endangered unless conservation measures are taken" and, conversely, species considered no longer at risk may be descheduled. The NCC have recently commissioned a report which examines what steps would need to be taken, and at what cost, to make each species on these schedules sufficiently secure in order that scheduling would no longer be necessary. This report will enable conservation priorities in relation to species protection to be identified. The RSPB are currently preparing a similar report for birds.

Birds are generally the best protected group of species under the Act. The provisions were neatly summed up by John Young as protecting some species at all times and remaining species for some of the time. All species of wild birds and their eggs, except certain game birds and 'pests' listed in Schedule 2, cannot legally be killed, injured, taken, possessed or traded except under licence. Schedule 2 birds may be killed outside the close season. The provision of sanctions against the possession of eggs was new under the 1981 Act. Schedule 1 lists those species such as golden eagles and red-throated divers which are given added special protection against disturbance at the nest, again except under licence from the NCC. Infringements against Schedule 1 birds also attract special penalties. Schedule 3 lists species which may be traded if bred in captivity and close ringed as fledglings. Schedule 4 covers birds, mainly raptors, which may be held in captivity if registered with the DoE and ringed.

Red-throated Diver *Sidney Clarke*

Several speakers highlighted the difficulties of enforcing certain aspects of the Act. With respect to birds in Scotland, we are all too aware that illegal poisoning of raptors and the collection of rare birds' eggs remains a problem. The pressure placed on game keepers by landowners seeking a high rate of return in the bag from poults released was generally agreed to be one major problem. Clearly education has a role to play here and it might help if keepers were regarded as professionals and given training and remuneration in accordance with this status. Interestingly, the Act contains a requirement for local authorities to educate school children about its provisions, but I somehow doubt that many hard pressed teachers find time to do so.

Superintendent Robert McMillan of the Tayside Police, who is also a longstanding member of the SOC and keen birdwatcher, gave a very interesting talk on the police's role in enforcing the Act. His talk made it clear that, to some degree, the successful implementation of species protection provisions depends on the interest of individual policemen, such as himself, on a local level. Faced with the more pressing problems in our society, such items are inevitably not at the top of the priority list. However, the Act does give the police very extensive powers under which to operate if possible infringements are brought to their attention. To date, in Scotland, this has mainly related to incidences of illegal killing of wild birds or egg collection brought to police attention by the RSPB.

Superintendent McMillan's talk prompted numerous questions from the audience concerning the public's role in these matters. The basic message is that if you do see anything suspicious, make detailed notes and contact the police and/or the RSBP as soon as possible. One perceived difficulty under Scottish Law is the requirement for two witnesses, but in reality this strictly applies only where there is no other corroborative evidence. So, if for example you were to witness someone taking eggs from an eagle nest and their vehicle is subsequently found to contain incubators etc., your testimony might well be sufficient to bring a successful prosecution. Superintendent McMillan stressed that there is no point in bringing such matters to the attention of the police unless you are ultimately willing to testify in the courts. However, the need for some caution was stressed. The potential financial rewards for illegal taking of wild birds are high as are the fines which may be imposed by the courts so that it is advisable not to attempt to intervene but rather to make a full and accurate record of events.

There were several details of the law discussed which may be of particular interest to readers. The trapping of crows using live decoys in traps is not illegal so long as the decoy is not injured or tethered. Likewise, wire snares for rabbits etc. are legal provided that they are checked daily by the keeper and are not positioned such that they are likely to trap scheduled species. The use of any poison baits or snap traps, except under cover for rats etc., is illegal and should be reported to the police and RSPB. Injured animals may legally be killed or taken into captivity to tend until fit to return to the wild. Dead game on roads is the property of the adjacent land owner – so take care next time you lift a dead pheasant for the pot!

The seminar provided some insights into current thinking on general conservation matters in Britain. The 1981 Act operates on the basis of providing protection to certain species and to very limited areas of natural or semi-natural habitats in SSSIs. The new approach favours more integrated habitat management in the countryside as a whole. International conservation conventions also offer the prospect of co-operative protection being afforded to key habitats and migratory species world wide. In Scotland it remains to be seen how such approaches to conservation will be implemented, and to what extent they will prove to be effective in safeguarding vulnerable species and habitats, under the new Natural Heritage Agency.

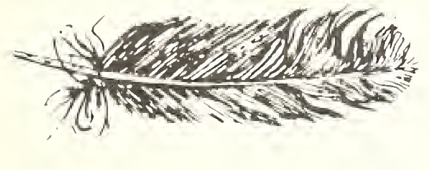
Kate Thompson

Mar Lodge Estate

The Mar Lodge estate, encompassing 77,000 acres in upper Deeside and the Cairngorms, was put on the market by its American owner in March, reputedly at an asking price of £12-£13 million. The estate includes large areas of native pinewood and heather moorland, habitats of crucial importance to some of Scotland's rarest breeding birds. Conservation groups are calling for the estate to be purchased by government and managed by the new Scottish Natural Heritage Agency (SNHA). Professor Aubrey Manning, chairman of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, has stated that the estate red deer population must be managed in a manner "unlikely to appeal to a private owner" in order to allow natural regeneration of the pinewoods and to halt degeneration of the hillsides. Dr Adam Watson was quoted in the press as saying that the deer damage in Derry Wood was the worst he had ever seen it. There had, he pointed out, been virtually no natural regeneration there since the 18th century and in the absence of anything being done soon to control deer numbers, he foresaw the eventual total extinction of the ancient Caledonian forest, which he likened to the natural equivalent of the great cathedrals of our architectural heritage.

The current owner is the American fast food billionaire John Kluge, who bought the estate in 1989; it was widely believed that the attraction of giving his wife royal neighbours was Kluge's main motivation, and that an impending divorce has removed this rationale. The motives inspiring any new owner must be a cause of concern to all those who share Adam Watson's view on the irreplaceable value of an area which includes 20,500 acres of the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve, three of the five highest mountains in Britain and the wealth of associated fauna and flora which this implies.

Magnus Magnusson, the chairman–designate of the SNHA, is in favour of the estate's being managed by the SNHA. However, he has suggested that the estate could be taken over by a trust or consortium, rather than being purchased by the crown. He would reportedly favour an integrated management approach with the mansion house possibly being run as a prestigious hotel while other parts of the estate could be reserved purely for conservation. This has disappointed those who believe that the only possible longterm solution is outright purchase on behalf of the nation, and merely added fuel to the criticisms being levelled against Magnus Magnusson and particularly against the Cairngorms working party which he chairs and which many feel to be dominated by landowners, businessmen and councillors, to the virtual exclusion of conservationists. To quote *The Scotsman*, "the chances of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland at last standing up to the lairds is about as likely as remaining upright on Ben Macdui in a howling gale".



Hen Harrier *Don Smith*

Glen Dye update

Lord Coulsfield's judgement earlier this year in favour of the Fasque Estate's application to the Forestry Commission for a grant in excess of £500,000 to plant conifer over 2000 acres of heather moorland in Glen Dye has angered conservationists. Several conservation groups including the NCC, RSPB and North-east Raptor Study Group had provided detailed objections to the proposed scheme which were overruled by the Scottish Office (*SBN* 21-7). Kincardine and Deeside District Council's challenge of the Scottish Office's decision in the courts led to Lord Coulsfield's judgement.

Dr. Adam Watson, formerly of the ITE and now a Countryside Commissioner, stated that the judgement confirmed that "the Forestry Commission is not bound by any clear rules when it comes to handing over huge sums of public money". Dr. Watson was particularly angry that a new EC directive on environmental assessment (EA) had not been applied to the Glen Dye test case. Lord Coulsfield stated that the directive left decisions on individual cases to the discretion of the EC's member states and that the British EA regulations were introduced two days after the Glen Dye proposal had been received by the Forestry Commission.

If proposed new EC environmental assessment rules are adopted, they will require farmers who are contemplating major changes in the way they use their land to comply with considerably more stringent regulations than have been the case up to now, and bring requirements affecting them more into line with those already applicable to other forms of development. The proposed new rules could make six types of farm development subject to obligatory environmental assessment: –

Plans to restructure land holdings covering more than 100 hectares
Changes of use of uncultivated land, semi-natural areas of natural or semi-natural forests covering more than 100 hectares
Irrigation schemes covering more than 200 hectares
Drainage of more than 5 hectares of natural or semi-natural wetlands
Intensive livestock production
Reclamation of more than 200 hectares of land from the sea

It is hoped that European environment ministers will approve the changes by the end of the year. While Giuseppe Sapienza, the head of the Brussels policy unit responsible, agrees that winning political support will not be easy, he is convinced that such a system is needed. The events at Glen Dye lend backing to this view.

While various voices were raised against the Glen Dye proposals, some press space was devoted to the thesis that environmentalists had "gone over the top" in opposing afforestation of 873 hectares of heather moorland, when there was a total of some 300,000 in Grampian region. Did environmentalists want to sterilise 1.5 million Scottish hectares? The obvious fact that only a small proportion of these hectares constituted, for example, suitable merlin and hen harrier breeding territory was however brought out by conservationists, and the last word should perhaps, appropriately, rest with Adam Watson.

"To me, moorland afforestation is fine, provided that planning permission is obligatory as is normal for development involving change of use, and that the landowner uses his own cash like any other business, including extra costs of public roads, bridges and damage to other interests. If he wants taxpayers' money, the answer should be no, as with other lame-duck industries that have lost public money massively. It's time the people were told how their money is abused in secret, without their consent."

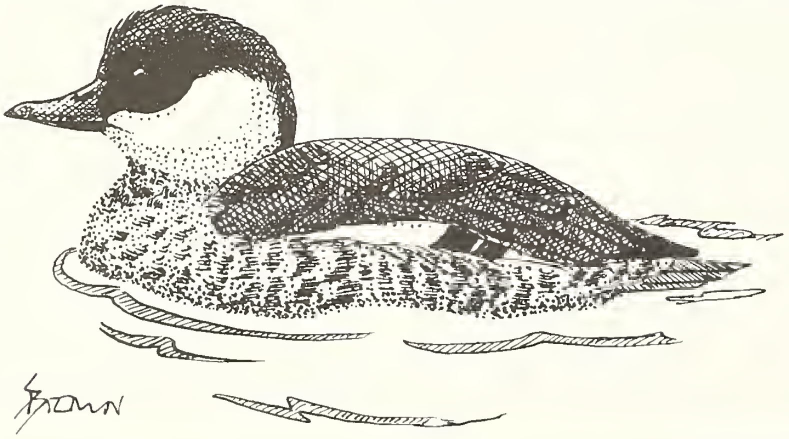
Recent reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to ***Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,*** *at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

One of the best winter periods of recent years with, amongst other things, good number of **white-winged gulls** and **Smew** as well as remnants of the **Waxwing** and **Little Auk** invasions from the early winter.

All of the 5 **White-billed Divers** reported were, not surprisingly, in Orkney and Shetland, whilst the **Black-browed Albatross** returned for yet another lonely vigil at the Hermaness gannetry, only to find its favourite hollow occupied, somewhat symbolically, by a pair of gannets. The same bird was perhaps involved in the sighting of an **Albatross sp.** off Orkney near Kirkwall on 11th Feb. Two unseasonable **Manx Shearwaters** were off Corsewall Point on 6th Jan., whilst 2 **Bitterns** were recorded, an elusive one at Loch of Strathbeg and an obliging one at Duddingston Loch. **Bewick's Swans** were fairly thin on the ground, the peak count being 16 at Caerlaverock in Jan., whilst **Bean Geese** recorded away from their usual areas included 8 at Aird Marsh, Stranraer on 8th Feb., and 2 at Tyninghame on 17th Feb. Of slightly more questionable origin perhaps, were the 2 **Snow Geese** in Aberdeenshire, although genuine birds do unquestionably occur. A **Ross Goose** near Lossiemouth during March was certainly of dubious origin. Single small race **Canada Geese** were seen at Caerlaverock and Loch Ken.

American Wigeon continued to be prevalent in south-east Scotland with a pair again at Stenhouse Reservoir and single drakes at Montrose Basin, Vane Farm and Gladhouse Reservoir. Five **Green-winged Teal,** 2 **Red-crested Pochards** and 3 **Ring-necked Ducks** was a reasonable showing, although the star ducks of the period were undoubtedly the drake **Lesser Scaup** at Auchenreoch Loch and the female **Harlequin Duck** at Wick, Scotland's third in the last four years. Seven **King Eiders** included up to 3 drakes on the Ythan Estuary, whilst there was a fairly typical showing of **Surf Scoters** for recent years and a drake **Black Scoter** off Embo, Sutherland, during March. There were good numbers of **Smew**.



Smew *Steven Brown*

Green Sandpiper *Angus Hogg*

A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was on Yell on 28th Feb. whilst, not suprisingly, unusual waders were fairly thin on the ground. The wintering **Long-billed Dowitcher** remained at WWT Caerlaverock whilst wintering **Green Sandpipers** were found at Lochwinnoch and Findhorn Bay and **Spotted Redshanks** at Kinneil, Caerlaverock and Valleyfield Lagoon, Fife. The wintering **Common Sandpiper** managed to survive into Jan. at Irvine, whilst there was an unseasonable **Whimbrel** at Auskerry, Orkney on 21st Jan. A **Grey Phalarope** was off Anstruther on 3rd Jan. Five **Mediterranean Gulls** were recorded as well as a hybrid **Mediterranean × Black-headed Gull** at Musselburgh on 18th Feb. Orkney proved completely dominate for **Ring-billed Gulls**, with no less than 3 different individuals sighted, the only other one being a first-winter bird at Musselburgh from 15th March.

An excellent winter for **white-winged gulls**, although not quite reaching the levels of the halcyon days of the early 1980s. There may well have been up to 140 **Iceland Gulls** and 75 **Glaucous Gulls**, although accurate totals are almost impossible to gauge. A west coast bias of records is evident with Ullapool, in particular, excelling. Peak counts from there were 28 **Iceland** and 11 **Glaucous Gulls**, whilst counts of **Iceland Gulls** elsewhere included 5 at Strathclyde Park, 3 at Doonfoot and up to 10 at Lerwick. A first-winter gull at Ayr showing features of a controversial species, **Thayer's Gull**, resided for over two months, whilst Orkney also produced a live **Brunnich's Guillemot** off Sule Skerry on 25th Jan. Good numbers of **Little Auks** were still present in early Jan. and records included 400 plus off Nairn on 9th Jan., 127 off Kirkcaldy on 1st Jan. and 105 off Musselburgh on 19th Jan.

Orkney's fourth ever **Stock Dove** was on North Ronaldsay in early March, whilst a **Hoopoe** managed to winter at Nairn. **Waxwing** records were widespread throughout, although there were few large flocks after mid Jan. Counts included 380 in Edinburgh on 1st-2nd Jan., 140 in Darnley, Glasgow on 6th Jan., 70 in Dunfermline and 80 in Aberdeen during Feb. and 72 in Pollok Park, Glasgow on 21st-22nd March. A **Black Redstart** was seen near Stranraer in Feb. with another one on North Ronaldsay in March. The first **Wheatear** was at Aberlady Bay on 10th March, whislt, more unusually, there were single **Whinchats** at Coaltown of Wemyss, Fife and Braco, Perthshire on 5th and 16th March respectively.

Whinchat *David Mitchell*

Five **Great-grey Shrikes** were recorded in Ayrshire, Fife, Lanarkshire and Ross-shire. An **Arctic Redpoll** was reported from Perth on 20th Feb., whilst **Lapland Buntings** continued to be scarce with just 4 singles reported from Fife, East Lothian and Morayshire. Finally, a **Little Bunting** visited a Dingwall garden during Jan., thus continuing a remarkable series of winter records from that area which perhaps suggest that there is a regular small wintering population.

Angus Murray

Some of the above reports were obtained from records phoned into Birdline Scotland, an information service for Scottish birdwatchers, The Birdline Scotland number is ***0898 700234*** *(calls charged at 34p per minute cheap rate and 45p per minute at all other times, inclusive of VAT). Any news can be phoned into the hotline number* ***0292 611994*** *(24 hour answerphone service). All calls to the hotline with pertinent news will gain a credit for conservation. Credits have already been paid towards projects such as tern rafts in the Forth, pied flycatcher nestboxes, the Fife Atlas, North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory and Vane Farm RSPB Reserve. In addition, anyone making 60 pertinent calls to the hotline between 1st March and the end of the year will receive a year's subscription to the Birding World Magazine paid for by Birdline Scotland.*

Illegal shooting of protected birds

Police in Dalkeith are conducting an inquiry into allegations that protected species of birds, including sparrowhawks and goosanders, were shot by a sporting party on land owned by Buccleuch Estates.

Buccleuch Estates is run by the Earl of Dalkeith, a leading member of the NCC and son of the Duke of Buccleuch. Last year an apparently high incidence of illegal poisoning of birds of prey occurred on Estates land in Langholm. A former gamekeeper claimed to have been supplied with poison by the estate. Subsequently, every keeper employed by the estate was warned by letter that illegal killing of such birds was a sackable offence.

The latest incidents are alleged to have taken place during a pheasant shoot at Dalkeith Palace which for the past three seasons has been let to a syndicate including Scottish businessmen and a senior Conservative politician. A spokesman for the syndicate said he was aware of the accusations but had no knowledge of any such incident. The chief executive of Buccleuch Estates confirmed that a police inquiry had begun.

Wintering blackcaps

With its generally mild climate, the inner Moray Firth area is an ideal one for wintering blackcaps and the number of records there probably surpasses that of any other district in the Highlands. The area has been prominent in this respect since the early days of the species' general overwintering increase. The late John Lees of Avoch in the Black Isle noted this species to be a regular winter visitor and ringed 7 birds (4 males and 3 females) from 1949 to 1959, all in December and January.

At Dornoch in south-east Sutherland I myself have sighted 30 male and 19 female wintering blackcaps between 1959 and 1990 and have received reports of several others. The breakdown by month of my sightings are as follows: November, 18; December, 14; January, 11; February, 4 and March, 2. These figures are suggestive of a high mortality rate. In severe winters they probably suffer to a considerable extent but, on the other hand, the lengthening daylight may to some extent account for their less frequent visits to bird tables in the latter months.

Most sightings have been at bird tables where the blackcap could be described as an almost omnivorous feeder. The first wintering bird which I saw was busily picking at the remains of a duck carcass put out on a bird table. Some individuals are very aggressive and chase away any other small passerines which attempt to feed alongside them. One male pursued a blackbird while a very bold female refused to be intimidated by either a blackbird or a starling. One male was observed hovering over bird table food. Away from bird tables most sightings were of birds feeding on berries, particularly elder berries in November. Roosting birds were observed twice, one in a large ivy clump and the other in a yew tree. Between 27 October and 14 November 1976 two males and one female were picked up dead and another male found stunned, all below a window in a Dornoch street (*British Birds* 71: 132-133).

Donnie MacDonald

Female Hen Harrier *Arthur Gilpin*

Death by design

Illegal poisoning, shooting and trapping has killed 814 birds of prey and owls, and more than 700 dogs and cats during the last ten years. Of these 38 were golden eagles, 47 peregrines, 141 hen harriers, 31 goshawks, a red kite and 127 buzzards and almost certainly many more deaths went unrecorded.

The joint RSPB/NCC report lists 25 recommendations to try to stop persecution. They call for stronger legislation and enforcement to bring offenders to court, stiffer penalties, tighter control on the supply and use of pesticides, research and education to halt misuses of poisons.

Persecution occurs throughout the UK, especially in areas where pheasants are reared and on upland grouse moors and sheep rearing areas, Scotland being one of the worst affected areas.

Persecution is particularly high in spring during the game-bird breeding and lambing seasons. Many birds are killed in the mistaken belief that they threaten the livelihoods of gamekeepers and farmers. Others fall victim to illegally placed poison bait to control foxes and crows.

Deliberate persecution has a crippling effect on some species and continues to restrict the range of birds such as red kite, hen harrier, golden eagle and buzzard.

Only by strengthening the law and creating better co-operation between conservationists, landowners and the authorites can these illegal practices be stopped.

Egg collecting continues

The RSPB have released figures concerning thefts of wild birds' eggs in 1990 which show that some species are still at risk from this illegal practice. Over 100 incidents were reported and the RSPB estimates that c. 300 collectors are currently active in Britain. Raptors were again the most severely affected group in 1990 with nests of peregrine falcons (13), red kites (9), ospreys (9), merlin (4), golden eagle (3), goshawk (2) and hen harrier (2) known to have been raided. The RSPB estimates that thefts of osprey and red kite eggs over the past 10 years have slowed down these two species population growth rates by 1%. Dotterel and red-throated diver nests were also plundered in 1990.

The RSPB has produced a leaflet about egg theft and means of combating it called *Egg Detectives* which may be obtained from: **RSPB, Department 127ED, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL.**

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link

How often are decisions being made by distant government offices which affect you or your interests and on which you feel you have little or no influence? Probably quite often, in recent years, as we watch the pieces of the old Nature Conservancy Council try to find their feet and (in Scotland) prepare to merge with the Countryside Commission for Scotland, and listen to the on-going debate on National Parks or Natural Heritage Areas for Scotland.

In that case, you may find some relief in learning that the views of SOC members are being voiced through the auspices of the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link (SWCL) of which the SOC is now a full member.

What is the SWCL? It is an organisation which, as its name suggests, exists to link together organisations with an interest in the Scottish countryside and its wildlife. There are at present more than 30 member organisations with interests as diverse as birds and botany, mountaineering and landscape, education and archaeology. SWCL offers its members up-to-the-minute information on current issues and a forum for discussion. It does not always speak on behalf of all its members – not surprising considering the variety of interests represented – but enables member organisations to pass informed opinion on matters affecting their particular interests. SWCL can also act as a single contact point for government departments seeking the opinion of the voluntary bodies.

Next time, therefore, you hear of a proposal on which you have strong views speak to your branch representative or phone Michael Murphy at No. 21. You can then be sure it will get a wider airing at the next meeting of SWCL and be given the wider publicity it may need.

Merlin in artificial crow's nest *Graham Rebecca*

Merlins using man-made crow's nests

In 1986 A.G. Payne installed eight artificial crow's nests in three regularly used merlin breeding areas in Perthshire. Natural crow's nests in these areas had rarely lasted more than a year, either being blown down or shot out by gamekeepers. The artificial nests were situated about 40m apart in birch trees in moribund birch-alder woodland on grass dominated moor. One area had recently been underplanted with sitka spruce. Three nests were put in each of two areas and two in the other. They were made by interweaving birch twigs through a 2cm wire netting base which was then filled with peat and lined with moss or dead grass. One nest was used successfully in each area and a total of eight young merlin fledged.

From 1987 to 1990 G.W. Rebecca monitored the areas and repaired the nests as necessary. Each year they required additional twigs and relining. By 1989 the wire netting was rusting through and the nests were beginning to disintegrate. In 1990 the RSPB and the Forestry Commission were involved in a joint project within the Grampian and Highland Regions where about fifty artificial crow's nests were installed, mainly along forest edges bordering moorland. They were situated near former merlin nesting areas or in areas which appeared suitable for breeding merlins. These nests were designed by M. Canham. Plastic-coated hanging flower baskets of 30cm diameter and 13cm deep with 2-3cm mesh were used for the basic nest structure. Heather, larch and cypress twigs were interwoven through the mesh. These nests were filled and lined as above. One (in Sutherland), was used by merlins but unfortunately the clutch failed at the late incubation stage. Another in Grampian was used by kestrels, but this also failed in late incubation. G.W.R. installed one of these "new nests" in each of the three Perthshire areas in 1990. One of them was used successfully by merlins and three young fledged. In the second area the merlins used a natural crow nest and fledged four young. In the third area, the birch trees are now swamped by thicket stage sitka spruce and no merlins have been seen since spring 1987. The summary of occupation and breeding success for the three areas is as follows:

	Areas occupied	*Artificial nest used*	*Natural nest used*	*Young fledged*
1986	3	3	–	8
1987	2	1	–	4
1988	2	1	1	6
1989	1	?	?	0
1990	2	1	1	7

The initial reasons for installing the nests in Perthshire were:

(a) to ascertain if merlins would use man-made nests

(b) to establish nest sites that would not be shot out

(c) to provide permanent nest sites in the nesting areas to simplify monitoring.

The main aim of the second project is to provide potential nest sites in areas where other nests are lacking, eg. at forest edges. It is planned to install a further fifty artificial nests during 1991. There is considerable scope within Scotland for this idea to be expanded, e.g. on grassy sheepwalk. Merlins once used an artificial crow's nest in a shelter belt on Northumbrian sheepwalk (A. Bankier, pers. comm). In the same region, 150 artificial crow's nests have been installed around the edge of Kielder Forest. Despite an expanding merlin population there, none of the artificial nests has been used (Little, B. & Davidson, M.: *Merlins (Falco columbarius) using crow nests in Kielder Forest, Northumberland*. Bird Study, in press). A possible reason for this is that there are more than enough natural crow's nests available (M. Davidson, pers. comm.). In Shetland merlins have twice used old crow's nests on an electricity pole and, once on a radio tower (*British Birds* 77, pp 73-74).

It may perhaps be feasible to install man-made crow's nests on similar man-made structures in other areas. If merlins were to use man-made nests on a regular basis, there is a potential for them to expand their breeding range into new areas lacking suitable nesting sites at present. There is also the possibility of encouraging them to reoccupy former nesting areas.

We thank all those who helped install the nests and the gamekeepers concerned for their co-operation. We also thank K.D. Shaw and the RSPB members from Grampian who made the flower basket nests.

G.W. Rebecca and A.G. Payne,
c/o RSPB, 17 Regent Terrace,
Edinburgh EH7 5BT
M. Canham,
Forestry Commission, Ferness, Nairn, IV12 5JG

Garden nesting merlin

On 12 May 1990 I received a phone call from a retired doctor who told me he had a pair of merlins nesting in the garden of his holiday cottage. In answer to my scepticism he held the phone to the window and I could hear clear falconid noises.

A visit next day confirmed their presence. They were using a crow nest built in 1989 during the owner's absence. The nest was 20-30 feet up in a large fir, 15 metres directly in front of the cottage door. The tree was downhill from the cottage so the nest was low enough that the whole of the bird's head could be clearly seen from the door as she incubated. It was possible to watch the birds entering and leaving the nest from a chair at the cottage window. The owner and his wife had been at the cottage from mid April, well before the birds laid, although probably after they chose their site. The birds seemed unconcerned at our presence and regularly plucked prey on the garden fence. Five young were fledged.

The cottage is in Tayside at 350 metres above sea level on a minor public road which divides enclosed pasture from heather moor.

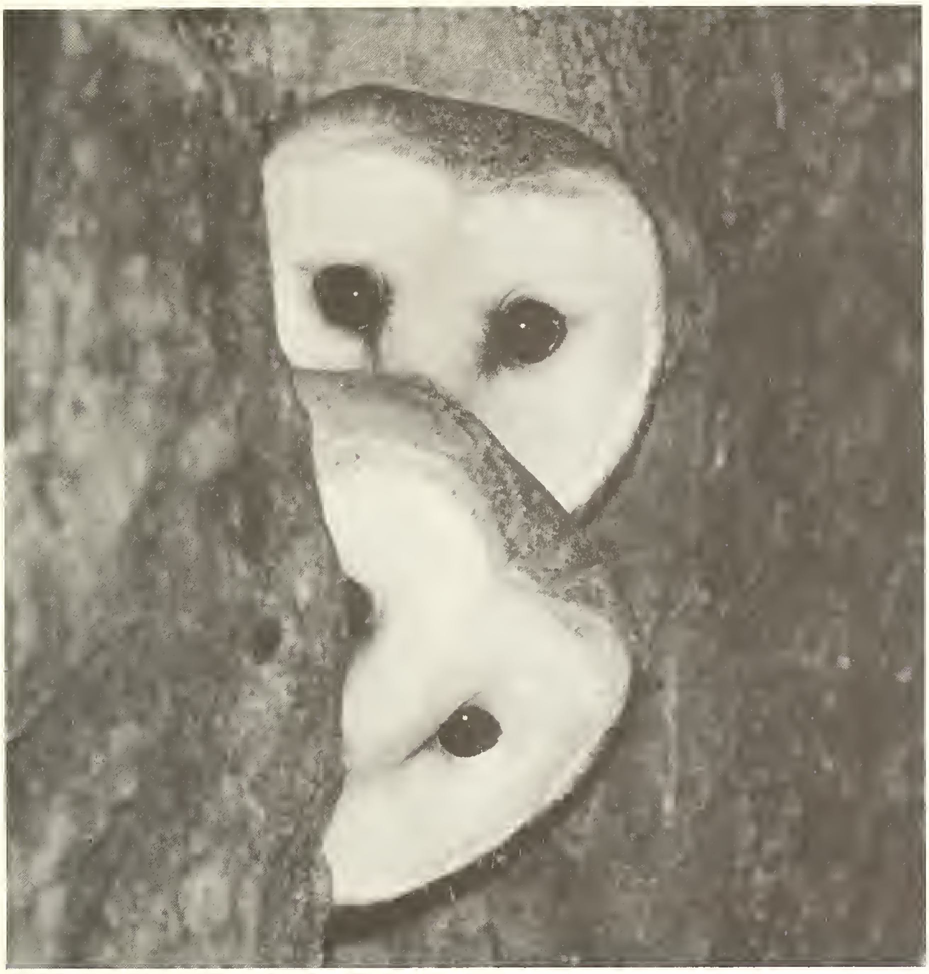
I know of only one other garden nesting merlin, again in a crow nest at a holiday cottage in Tayside, in 1989 (pers. comm. G. Rebecca), but this cottage was unoccupied throughout the breeding season and the pair failed to rear young (far less speak on the telephone).

Bruce Anderson

Two buzzards mobbed by a merlin

I read with interest the note about two buzzards being mobbed by a merlin near Tyndrum (*SBN* 13: 7), but contrary to the author's final paragraph, this behaviour has been documented before. Hendy (*Somerset Birds*, 1944) recorded two merlins mobbing five buzzards at one time over a nesting coombe in Exmoor. The most I have seen in Galloway has been three buzzards mobbed by a pair of merlins over their nesting crag in June 1972. This behaviour occurs quite regularly where the two species are nesting close to each other, but the number of buzzards involved probably depends on the numbers breeding in the vicinity. These attacks can be quite sustained. On 4th July 1976 a female merlin stooped and swooped on a buzzard which was intruding on its nesting moor 42 times until the buzzard moved away.

R.C. Dickson



Brian Turner

Yuppie owls?

Barn owl nest boxes have recently been incorporated into a luxury steadings conversion near Longniddry, East Lothian. The birds were displaced from their former nest sites when several dead elms were felled as a consequence of the residential development. Prospective human residents of the steadings complex will require in the order of £100,000 to purchase their new home, but the owls' housing has been provided free of charge by the developer, Ken Greig.

Merlins calling in autumn and winter

I read with interest the notes about merlins calling in autumn and winter (*SB* 13: 188-189; *SBN* 21:17). Although normally silent away from their roosts in winter, I have recorded them calling on five occasions during the day in Galloway.

On 8th February 1969 a brown merlin chased and harried a carrion crow over a low-lying moor uttering shrill calls as it persistently stooped on the crow. The crow landed in a shallow thicket where the merlin continued to swoop over its head while still uttering calls. The merlin landed on a fence post and as the crow attempted to fly away, again attacked it forcing the crow back to the thicket. Another brown merlin then appeared and both birds swooped on the crow, but I could not hear if any calls were uttered. On 29th November 1969, at a rushy field, a male merlin uttered continuous calls as it swooped persistently on a carrion crow in a beech tree until both flew away. On 7th February 1970, over a low-lying moor, a male and a brown merlin were chasing a small passerine which escaped by diving into cover. The two merlins gave up the chase and began pursuing each other. Finally they swooped up before the brown merlin dived down to land on a fence post uttering a shrill call, followed closely by the male which also landed as another brown merlin circled near them. On 11th October 1976 over farmland, two brown merlins uttered excited calls as the larger bird pursued the smaller one. The birds once "fluttered" together stalled in flight and still called as they disappeared behind some conifers. On 20th November 1979 I disturbed a brown merlin from a fence post over a low moorland edge and it uttered shrill calls as it flew away.

Kenneth Williamson (*Scot. Nat.* 61: 19-31) also recorded a male and female merlin keeping up an intermittent "keening" as they indulged in "aerial bouts" with up to three hooded crows on Fair Isle on 25th August 1948. On 18th August 1953 he also recorded in the Double Dyke trap, three merlins playfully chasing each other around the framework with strident calls (*Fair Isle and its Birds*, 1965).

R.C. Dickson

Editor's note: this correspondence concerning merlin calling behaviour is now closed. Thanks to all readers who submitted notes on this topic.

New atlas of breeding birds

The incubation period of the *New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* is nearing completion. Preliminary species texts and maps have been hatched and publication is more or less on schedule. For each species there will be three maps; one each showing distribution and abundance over the last four years and one showing the distributional changes since 1968-72. Obviously, we want these maps to be as up-to-date and accurate as possible, so may I make one more appeal to all readers to contribute to the project in this final breeding season? There are still some squares to be surveyed, predictably in the more remote parts of the country, but also in places not so hard to get to which are just as important, if not more so. For instance, we still need help in Ayrshire and Lanarkshire as well as up North. Please also keep the Supplementary Records forms rolling in.

When published, the new atlas will make interesting reading. It is already apparent that great changes in bird distribution have occurred over the past 20 years. Some of them are already well known, corncrake and corn bunting perhaps being obvious examples associated with changes in agricultural practices. Indeed, we will note many other changes consequent upon intensification of land use. Changes in upland bird populations will also be highlighted with afforestation affecting species such as siskin and goshawk as well as upland waders.

The new atlas project has generated a lot of data which will take time to analyse fully. The BTO has recognised this and has employed someone specifically to assist with the analyses. However, this will not delay publication and we should see the book on our shelves in late 1992 or early 1993. This will be followed in due course by more extensive publication of the results of the scientific analyses of the data. Anyone requiring more information about the new atlas project should contact me at: **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.**

Jim Reid (Scottish Co-ordinator)

"Euro Bird Week", Texel, Netherlands – 12 to 20 October, 1991

Under the auspices of "Dutch Birding", an international Bird Week is being held this autumn at Texel, one of the prime birding sites in Northern Europe. A programme is foreseen which will include birding trips during daylight hours, backed up by an extensive series of evening lectures and other more obviously "social" activities. It seems to present an excellent opportunity to combine bird-watching with meeting a wide range of other like-minded people from throughout Europe. The main language to be used will, fortunately, be English! Further details are held at 21 Regent Terrace. You may be interested in going in any case, but it strikes me that if enough people were interested, it might be possible to avail oneself of cheaper group facilities for travel and accommodation if a sufficient number of SOC members enrolled together. If you're even vaguely interested in such a scheme, why not ring me – preferably by 5 July – on (031) 556 6042 and I will see what might be done.

Michael Murphy

Raptor round up 1990

As last year, this report summarises the activities of all the Raptor Study Groups currently active in Scotland. A total of 301 eagle home ranges (211 occupied) and at least 471 peregrine sites were checked (398 occupied) as were over 367 merlin sites (over 280 occupied). This represents an immense amount of fieldwork, much of it done by 'amateurs'. The writing of this report would be absolutely impossible without them. This report is presented on their behalf and the name of the group co-ordinator for each species is included in brackets after each heading.

1990 was a rather mixed breeding season for birds of prey in Scotland – golden eagles had a disastrous season over much of their range, ospreys reared more young than ever before but fledging success was low, while in contrast it was a relatively good season for peregrines and merlins. The spring and summer of 1990 reverted to normal and were nothing like as dry or warm as 1988 and 1989. One bright note was that the number of confirmed poisoning incidents in 1990 was only about half of that of 1989 – perhaps the message is slowly getting through that this form of predator control is no longer acceptable. However, on the down side, general persecution of birds of prey especially peregrines and hen harriers was as bad as ever. Data on hen harriers from one area is included in this report to highlight just how bad a problem this can be.

Golden Eagle

North-east Scotland RSG
(Robert Rae, Keith Brockie)

There was a marked difference in breeding success between the east and west parts of the area covered by this group. In Grampian and north-east Tayside breeding success was considered to be average with 22 young reared from 15 nests. However, to the west it would appear that none of the nests were successful. This poor breeding success was repeated over much of the birds' range in Scotland in 1990 and one theory is that the exceptionally wet winter preceding the breeding season meant that many pairs may not have been in breeding condition by the spring and did not even bother getting round to egg laying. One site in Grampian was robbed of young.

Central Scotland RSG
(Dave Dick, Roger Broad)

The poor breeding success noted above was particularly prevalent in this area in 1990. Only three nests were successful in the whole area where in a normal year between 10-15 would be successful. It was considered that two sites were robbed of their eggs and at a further site an attempt was made to take the eggs.

Argyll
(Roger Broad)

Argyll was again very well covered by a small number of very committed individuals. Breeding success was once again very poor with only 18 nests being successful out of 68 checked.

Highland RSG
(Jeff Watson, RSPB Highland)

Golden eagle productivity (fledged young per pair) in a sample of about 50 pairs checked each year was 0.33 which was the lowest since the study began in 1981. In contrast to the rest of Scotland, pairs in the east and west of this area seemed to have similar breeding success.

Golden Eagle chick *David Gowans*

Uist RSG
(Tim Dix)

Breeding success is usually pretty low in the Western Isles and this year was no exception. Only two nests were successful each rearing one young. In one territory the birds laid an egg, but one of the adults was found dead later on in the year – it is not known how the bird died.

Lewis and Harris
(Alison Rothwell)

Once again a very large number of eagle territories were checked in this area and here breeding success was about the same as usual. There is evidence to suggest that at least three of the occupied territories failed due to human interference and of six pairs with a history of persecution none were successful.

Peregrine

Home range/site	L&H	NE	C	SW	SE	Arg	Hghl	Ork	Shet	Uist	Total
Checked	8	121	61	71	35	104	104	33	5+	8	471
Birds present	8	109	53	59+	31	24	84	17	5	8	398+
Eggs laid	0	84		51+	29	20	70	7-15	1		293+
Eggs hatched	0	62+		38+	18	17+	51	4-7	1		222+
Chicks fledged	0	58	30+	33	15	17+	46	4	1	6	205+
Total Young fledged	0	142+	67+	75	37	25+	96	4+	3	8	453+

Golden Eagle

Home range/site	L&H	NE	C	Arg	Hghl	Uist	Total
Checked	50	30	25	68	113	15	301
Birds present	41	29	25	60	84	14	211
Eggs laid	11	18+	10+	37-46		5	123+
Eggs hatched	10	16	3	21+		2	94+
Chicks fledged	9	15	3	18	42	2	89
Total Young fledged	10	22+	3	23	52	2	112

Merlin

Home range/site	L&H	Tsd	Grm	SW	SE	Arg	Hghl	Ork	Shet	Uist	Total
Checked	33	69+		24	25+	18+	53	46	29	12	367+
Birds present	11	47	58	23	25	18	43	14+	29	12	280+
Eggs laid	3		51	16	23	14	30	14	23		207+
Eggs hatched	3		39	12	21	9+	22	9	18+	3	166+
Chicks fledged	3	30	36	11	19	9	21	9	18	3	159+
Total Young fledged	10	95	108+	33+	59+	34	69	29	52	8	497+

Osprey

No. Pairs Known	No. Laying Eggs	No. Clutches Hatched	No. Successful Broods	Total No. Young Fledged
63	56	48	44	88

Peregrine

Lewis and Harris
(Alison Rothwell)

Eight sites were checked on Lewis and Harris in 1990 and although birds were present at all of them, breeding could not be proved at any. This situation is common to many of the Western and Northern Isles as many of the nest sites are inaccessible and cannot easily be seen into.

Uist RSG
(Tim Dix)

Of eight pairs found six were successful. At one site the chicks disappeared at the age of approximately one week and they are believed to have been taken – exactly the same happened at this site in 1989.

Highland RSG
(Colin Crooke)

Many more eyries were monitored in 1990 in this area than in 1989. Breeding success was felt to be average for the Highlands. The problems of persecution and theft were also felt in this area. Two Germans were first observed in this area before being apprehended going out of the country at Dover. They were subsequently sentenced to 2½ years and 18 months in prison, respectively. It would appear that the peregrines are no longer doing as well in the Highlands as they once were – this is perhaps linked to prey abundance.

Argyll
(Roger Broad)

In this area the number of young reared per successful pair was rather less than in other areas, but only slightly less if young fledged per occupied site are considered. This is perhaps due to the fact that few sites are lost to persecution or theft, but those which are successful rear less young, maybe because of prey abundance.

North-east Scotland RSG
(Jon Hardy, Keith Brockie)

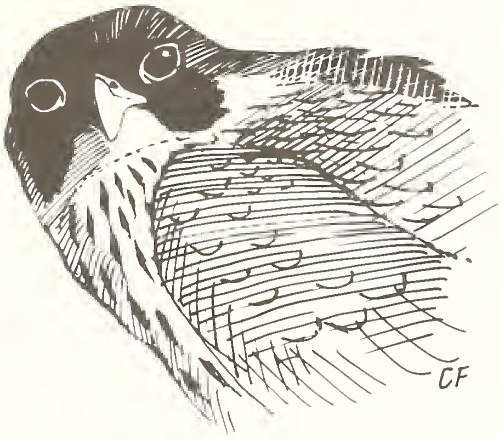
A very large number of sites were again checked in this area. In the Tayside portion of this group's area two clutches were stolen and six nests failed due to unknown causes. At one site in Glen Esk a male was found trapped by two Fenn traps. The gamekeeper was seen to arrive and kill the adult and one of the chicks in the nest. The gamekeeper's house was searched by the police and the corpses were found buried in his garden. He was subsequently fined £1000 at Forfar Sheriff Court. On one estate a pair managed to hatch chicks for the first time in 10 years. However they were found later on, lying at the base of the cliff having been destroyed.

Shetland
(Pete Ellis)

Peregrines fared slightly better in Shetland in 1990 than in 1989 with five occupied sites as opposed to three in the previous year. Again only one pair was successful but this year three young were raised as compared to one previously.

Orkney
(Eric Meek)

It is always very difficult to work out exactly what is happening at the peregrine sites in Orkney. This was certainly true in 1990 where only four pairs are believed to have fledged young out of 15, though the true figure could be somewhat higher. Site occupation is still rather low in this area with only half the sites having pairs present.



Peregrine *C. Fisher*

Central Scotland RSG
(Patrick Stirling-Aird)

In one part of this area, which has been studied intensively since 1979, the brood size was the highest ever recorded, presumably indicating a good food supply for peregrines. No new prey species were recorded in 1990 but blue hare leveret remains were found at three eyries in grouse moor country. Of six nesting attempts which failed it seems that two were the result of deliberate interference. At the remaining four it is perhaps more likely that losses were due to weather.

South-west Scotland RSG
(Dick Roxburgh)

South-west Scotland was once again the area most badly hit by egg and chick thieves. It appears that in excess of 20 nests were robbed at some stage. These include the sites which were robbed by two Germans who were caught in Galloway. Nine peregrine eggs were found in their possession and they were subsequently fined £6000 each.

South-east Scotland RSG
(George Carse)

1990 was a relatively successful season in this area, but this was generally due to the successful nests rearing more young. There are a number of sites in this area that are consistently unsuccessful. In 1990, 15 sites were thought to fail due to human intervention of some kind or another, whilst another five sites failed due to unknown causes.

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Merlin

Lewis and Harris
(Alison Rothwell)

Although 33 sites were checked in this area only 11 were felt to be occupied of which three were successful. Very large parts of this area appear to be suitable for merlins and it is probable that very intensive fieldwork here would produce more pairs.

For the first time in these reports the North east raptor group area is split up into its Tayside and Grampian components for this species.

Tayside (Wendy Mattingley, Bruce Anderson, Ron Downing)

Most of the birds in Tayside are located in three very large study areas in the north and east of the area. Much of the best heather moorland lies in this area, the rather more grassy habitats in the south and west supporting relatively few birds. In Angus 1990 was the best year both for numbers of successful pairs and the number of young raised to fledging since the study began there in 1983. In this area one pair failed due to predation of eggs by a stoat but the birds relaid nearby and raised five young to fledging.

Grampian
(Graham Rebecca)

The long term study in this area continued through 1990 with large parts of the suitable habitat covered. Thirteen nests failed in this area as follows;

7 had eggs broken or disappeared
1 deserted eggs
2 had broods predated
1 brood disappeared (probably robbed)
2 females were predated at nest at the egg stage (one of which was killed by a short-eared owl)

South-west Scotland RSG
(Dick Roxburgh)

Fewer sites were checked in this area in 1990 than in the previous year, yet more were occupied. Fledging success was slightly down on last year. In one part of this area merlins have been found nesting along the edge of conifer plantations, a habit which has also been noted in other parts of Britain. Given the rather small amount of time which raptor workers spend in this habitat it is possible that this is a more widespread phenomenon than is currently thought.

South-east Scotland RSG
(Alan Heavisides)

The majority of merlins in this area are located in three study areas. In one it was felt to be a very mixed year with poor results in the north of the area but very good ones in the south. Five new sites were found in this area. In another of the areas a ground nest failed soon after hatching with mink felt to be the culprit.

Orkney
(Eric Meek)

1990 turned out to be the most successful breeding season for merlins in Orkney for over a decade with 29 young being reared from 9 successful nests.

Kestrel *Don Smith*

Shetland
(Pete Ellis)

The 1990 breeding season for merlins in Shetland was almost exactly the same as that of 1989 with similar numbers of successful nests and chicks reared. However productivity continues to be lower than in other areas of Scotland.

Uist RSG
(Tim Dix)

All the known nest sites were once again checked in this area in 1990. At one site the female was killed at incubation – possibly by a peregrine or golden eagle. At another site a female laid four eggs which were all found broken in nest – it then relaid and reared two young. Crossbill was noted as a food item in 1990 – record numbers having arrived on the Uists as part of the invasion.

Highland RSG
(Brian Etheridge)

This area had a very poor breeding season with only 50% of occupied sites raising any young. There were many failures due to a variety of reasons; this included two cases where the incubating female was killed by a predator at the nest (one by a bird and one by a mammal). However the majority of failures were of clutches disappearing between visits from unknown causes.

Argyll
(Roger Broad)

Breeding was proved in many parts of this area. Although this area holds relatively few birds, breeding success (young fledged per successful pair) was the highest anywhere in Scotland iin 1990.

Kestrel

(Gordon Riddle)

This study in Ayrshire began in 1972 and is still going strong. Although the weather in late March and early April was poor breeding started early – in fact the earliest ever recorded. The weather for the rest of the season was exceptionally good giving equally good results. Average clutch size was 5.3 and one hen which lost her first clutch of five moved to a nearby site and laid another five. 75% of the eggs hatched and brood survival was also very good at 88%. One pair was ousted from their nest site by barn owls. The most unusual event of the year was the rearing of two leucistic birds from a brood of three – these could still be seen in the area in the latter part of the year.

Osprey

(Roy Dennis)

Four more eyries were occupied in 1990 than in 1989; in addition two eyries held single birds. Seven nests were robbed by egg collectors (one of whom was taken to court and fined £2500) and one failed due to interference from a third osprey. A number of chicks in nests died due to very wet weather and food shortage and in addition three ospreys which had fledged died soon thereafter due to food shortage.

Hen Harrier

(Tayside)

Of 47 pairs located only 18 were successful rearing 52 young. Although some of these failures were from natural causes the vast majority were due to illegal persecution by gamekeepers.

Stuart Benn, RSPB

Rat elimination plan for Ailsa Craig

Ailsa Craig is just one of many islands around the world where breeding seabird populations have declined at least in part as a result of the introduction of alien predators by man. Brown rats reached Ailsa Craig in 1889 from vessels carrying supplies to the lighthouse. The Island's puffin population, which once numbered hundreds of thousand of pairs, declined rapidly between 1910 and the mid 1930s. In recent years only a handful of pairs have managed to breed in crevices in the steepest cliffs. Brown rats are certainly capable of preying on puffin eggs and chicks, but there is some debate as to whether rat predation was the main driving force behind historical puffin population declines on Ailsa Craig and other sites.

Now the Ailsa Craig Working Group, in conjunction with the NCC and Rentokil, hopes to eliminate rats from the island in an effort to allow the recovery of the puffin population. Warfarin, placed in bait boxes which only rats and not birds can enter, will be distributed around the Craig. If the control plan is to be successful it is essential that the entire rat population is killed. Chewsticks coated in margarine will also be distributed around the island to monitor levels of rat activity as the poisoning campaign progresses.

Bernie Zonfrillo, secretary of the working group, is hopeful that puffins will return to breed on Ailsa Craig once the rats have been eliminated. Now that puffin populations are routinely monitored at several other sites in Scotland, the Ailsa Craig experiment may provide new insights into the driving force behind puffin population fluctuations. The rat elimination project on Ailsa Craig is being funded in part by a grant from the SOC endowment fund.

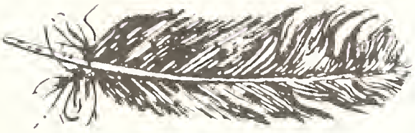
Interestingly, on Cardigan Island in Wales, where rats were eliminated in 1969 after colonising the Island from a shipwreck in 1934, puffins and shearwaters have not returned to breed of their own accord. The Dyfed Wildlife Trust have had some success in attracting back shearwaters using recordings of their calls. Now they are attempting to lure in prospecting puffins by placing nests of painted concrete puffins in former nesting areas, a ruse which has reportedly proved successful in Maine. So perhaps one day puffin gnomes may decorate the cliffs of Ailsa Craig!

Shag *Robert Smith*

Foraging patterns of shags breeding on the Isle of May

Some results of studies on the foraging ecology of shags breeding on the Isle of May have recently been published (*Ibis* 133: 30-36 and 37-42). Sarah Wanless and her colleagues used radio tracking techniques and automatic dive depth recorders to discover where the shags were feeding. The study was carried out over several breeding seasons on birds known to be rearing young. Analysis of regurgitated pellets indicated that the shags were feeding predominantly on sandeels with smaller quantities of various other fish also being taken.

The shags were found to feed entirely within a 13km radius of their colony. Feeding areas were located either within 2km of the Isle of May or in inshore waters up to 7km off



the north coast of the Firth of Forth. There was some variation between years in the location of the most favoured feeding sites, but birds were never found to feed to the south or east of the May. The preferred feeding areas are characterised by a 20 to 40m depth of water over sand or gravel bottom sediments. Deeper water over muddy sediments was generally avoided despite being predominant within the overall feeding radius of the birds.

Foraging shags typically flew directly to a single feeding site where they dived repeatedly over a 5 to 15 minute period before returning to the nest. On average, 40 to 50% of the birds' time underwater was spent feeding on or near the sea bed at depths of 25 to 35m. This is considerably deeper than previously recorded for British shags and the presence of sand grains in many of the pellets analysed suggests that the shags at times take sandeels lying buried in the bottom sediments.

Isle of May 1990

In 1990 the Isle of May Observatory was operational between mid March and early November. Both the spring and autumn migrations were generally rather light with few rarities. However, birds of note included a thrush nightingale in May and a scarlet rosefinch in September. Breeding success of terns, kittiwakes, shags and puffins was generally very poor.

Visitors to the observatory carried out maintenance and repair work on the buildings and traps. Trees and shrubs were planted in the top trap, but unfortunately the dry summer proved too much for some of these and also for the well which dried up for a period.

The NCC and Observatory are currently documenting the history of the May and would be interested to hear of any old photographs of the island which SOC members might possess. Of particular interest would be pictures of named people working either at the lighthouse or observatory. Anyone who has such photographs, or who is interested in joining the Isle of May Bird Observatory and Field Station Trust should contact: **Ian Darling, West Acres, 579 Lanark Road West, Balerno, Edinburgh EH14 7BL.**

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £43.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £100.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £15 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
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Telephone: Colonsay (09512) 316 – open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

Spring conference

The SOC-BTO Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference on 9th March in the Drummossie Hotel just outside Inverness attracted a full house of over 220 participants.

The first speaker was Jeff Watson of the NCC who has been studying golden eagles in Scotland for over ten years. He began his talk with a fascinating review of the species in Europe. Golden eagles exploit the most easily captured prey of appropriate size available to them. This means that different prey species are predominant in various regions: grouse and hares in Britain and Scandinavia, female capercaillies in the eastern Baltic countries, marmots in the Alps and Pyrenees, rabbits and red-legged partridge in the rest of the Iberian region and tortoises in south-eastern Europe and Turkey. Yes, tortoises, which the eagles drop from the air to crack the shells! Golden eagles are careful in their selection of nest sites with most nests below 500m altitude facing between east and north-west, away from the main heat of the sun, while those at higher altitudes more commonly face south. Jeff ended his talk with a discussion of topics still requiring further research. The big increase in afforestation in Scotland since the 1940s may now be starting to reduce numbers of breeding golden eagles, although earlier, when most forests were relatively young, eagles may have benefited slightly.

Bob Moss of the ITE speaking on capercaillie revealed that males are probably too big for their own good! Bob showed pictures of enormous puffed up males surrounded by much smaller females. In fact, females weigh less than 2kg while males weigh over 4kg. This means that male chicks must grow faster than their sisters, so that if poor weather reduces the availability of high protein insect food fewer male than female chicks survive. The cocks' skulls and beaks are enlarged and reinforced to withstand the rigours of fighting for a harem, but some appear to die of exhaustion at the end of the breeding season. Capers have been declining in Scotland since the early 1970s due, probably, to the felling of pine forests. They prefer pine woods with trees of good height and require open spaces between the tres both to fly through and to allow sunlight to reach the ground to support adequate insect food for the young birds. As male territories have a radius of about 1km, large tracts of suitable forest are required to support good populations. Further studies are needed to understand further aspects of the capercaillie's ecology such as the effects of varying degrees of shooting pressure. Intriguingly, one healthy capercaillie population is in a sitka spruce plantation rather than a pine forest.

The third talk was given by Tony Mainwood who has managed to combine a teaching career with studies of seabirds on remote islands. He revealed aspects of the life of storm petrels breeding on uninhabited Priest Island, the southernmost outlier of the Summer Isles. The stormie is the smallest breeding seabird of the North Atlantic, weighing less than a house sparrow, and comes ashore only during summer nights to nest in hidden crevices. The Priest island colony is one of the largest in Scotland and approaches the size of the best Irish colonies. Some birds ringed on the Island have turned up around South Africa.

Brian Etheridge of the RSPB began his talk on hen harriers with some fine shots of these beautiful birds in flight, including one diving straight at the photographer! His landscape shots illustrated the harrier's favoured breeding sites just above the upper limit of pastureland: mainly heather moorland in central and eastern Scotland but acid tussocky grassland in the west. Young conifer plantations are also suitable. Brian's work involves careful analysis of the results of various national and local hen harrier surveys. On land managed for game, shooting of harriers and destruction of their nests by keepers reduces average breeding success to 25% compared to over 85% on unmanaged moors or in young forests. Fortunately, despite this persecution, hen harriers are now holding their own. Before 1900 they were widespread in Britain but from 1900 to 1940 persecution restricted their distribution to a few remote areas. In the 1950s to 1970s there was a steady spread and since the 1970s the numbers in Scotland have been maintained.

A talk on entirely non-Scottish birds was given by Kate Thompson of the Falkland Islands Foundation who has been working on Falklands seabirds to assess the effect on them of the new fishing industry in the area. One of the first slides was of a large and apparently filthy old fishing vessel which turned out to be a modern squid jigger blackened by ink from the catch. Squid are caught in their millions around the Falklands and some fish such as southern blue whiting are also taken. The principal nesting seabirds are the black-browed albatross (70% of the world population), five species of penguin, two colourful shags and a variety of petrels. Kate recounted how she acquires penguin stomach content samples by pumping water into the stomach and then turning the birds upside-down over a suitable container. A slide

Seabird site: – Gannets on the Bass Rock *E.C. Fellowes*

showed that albatross chicks being weighed are quite happy to stay put in pan scales, which are of similar height to their nest mounds. Kate found that black-browed albatross, Magellanic penguins and gentoo penguins all feed on species taken by the fishing industry and may thus be potentially affected by it. However, the lack of information on Falklands seabirds before the growth of the fishery makes assessment of its impact difficult.

Andy Webb of the NCC's Seabirds at Sea team pointed out that the NCC has the responsibility of conserving the waters of the British Economic Exclusion Zone which includes continental shelf, shelf edge and deep Atlantic waters. However, Andy limited his talk to the Irish Sea and waters off the west coast of Scotland. Because of differences in the distribution patterns of various species a variety of survey techniques using observations from ships, aircraft and the land are employed. Divers occur on shelf waters: red-throated in all months, black-throated in all but April and May and the great northern is absent in summer but has an April peak. During May to September, Leach's petrels are scattered widely over shelf edge and oceanic waters, but by September and October the few remaining are found over shelf waters. Razorbills remain close to their colonies in May, but in July, when moulting and flightless, they are concentrated in the southern Minch near Jura and Islay, off north-west Ireland and in the southern Irish Sea. Black guillemots are widespread, nesting in boulder beaches if rats are absent but otherwise in cliff crevices. The team's findings on the distribution of seabirds around Britain have now been published in both a detailed and a concise format and can be purchased from the NCC. Oil companies are taking note of this information and some have avoided drilling in certain months where the NCC have demonstrated that birds would be at risk. In addition, most tankers now avoid going through the Minch under a voluntary ban, but the NCC would like to see this made compulsory.

The final speaker had to wear two hats. The programme had scheduled two talks from BTO staff; Humphrey Crick on the Nest Record Scheme and Steve Carter on goosanders. Unfortunately the former was ill and so Steve gallantly gave both talks, starting with goosanders. Earlier this century, goosanders in Britain bred only in western Scotland. Now they breed along rivers throughout Scotland and Wales and in many parts of England. This has led to calls from the angling fraternity for numbers to be controlled. Numbers of goosanders decline in early summer when adult males migrate from Britain to Scandinavia. Their congregation on one loch in the Tweed valley prior to departure appears to be unique in Britain. Examination of stomach contents shows that salmon and trout, particularly at the smolt stage, do form a sizeable proportion of the goosanders' diet. However, whether this predation has any significant effect upon recruitment of adult salmon back to their natal rivers is debatable. Further research will be required to answer this question.

Steve then switched to the final topic of the day, the BTO Nest Record Scheme. He outlined the value of the scheme in revealing interesting aspects of the breeding of birds, such as the effects of cold springs and habitat preferences. For instance, green woodpeckers show a preference for nesting in oak and ash, great spotted prefer birch and lesser spotted like a variety of species. The nesting success of merlins and sparrowhawks has improved since the 1970s. Many readers may well feel that they know a lot about BTO schemes already, but do you know what the Old Man of Hoy, the Post Office Tower and the Great Pyramid have in common? The answer is that they are all of similar height to the column which would be formed if all the nest record cards submitted to date were to be piled on top of each other!

Tired but content, the conference members dispersed, now able to see the road sides, unlike the morning when they had been forced by mist to play a game of hunt-the-hotel.

Harry E.M. Dott

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Reviews

***The Petrels – their ecology and breeding systems** by John Warham; Academic Press 1991; 440 pp. £28.50.*

This, the first of two volumes dealing with the "tubenoses" – albatrosses and shearwaters as well as diving, gadfly and storm petrels – is a very readable introduction to this fascinating group of birds.

After a perhaps somewhat too brief introductory chapter dealing with the order Procellariformes as a whole, chapters 2 to 10 deal in turn with distinct groups of genera or families. Although theoretically a little awkward, splitting the groups in this way works very well in practice.

Each of these chapters includes a general description of each species covered, a brief look at behaviour and lifestyle, feeding and breeding characteristics, and concludes with an overview of numbers, threats and conservation issues. The second volume will examine aspects such as behaviour, physiology, population biology and food in greater detail.

Breeding biology is examined in depth in the second part of this volume, covering everything from courtship through to fledging. Much fascinating detail is included here, but the nocturnal habits of many species frustratingly prevent full comparisons and parallels being drawn.

Much of the early work on this order was carried out in this country. I hope that this book and its companion will goad research workers here into taking a closer look at our four petrel species. It is anything but a dry text book intended solely for the petrel enthusiast. Authoritative yet accessible, it deserves and will reward a much wider readership.

David Mitchell

***Barn Owl Conservation in Forests** by G. Shaw and A. Dowell, Forestry Commission Bulletin 90. HMSO, London, 1990. 15pp, 4 colour plates, 3 figures, 1 table. £3.*

Over the last ten years or more a considerable amount of research effort has been invested into the barn owl populations of South-west Scotland. This is beginning to build up a detailed understanding of the bird, and of its requirements in an environment which has undergone major changes, largely through afforestation, since the 1950s. A decline in the numbers of abandoned buildings suitable for barn owls in the forests led to efforts to develop new nest boxes which would be used in their place.

After five years work and the installation of almost 150 nest boxes, the barn owl population of the study area increased from 2-4 to 31 pairs, and tawny owls occupied up to 14 boxes. The design and erection of these boxes is delightfully simple, using 80l. plastic drums tied to trees, and the use of these drums can, and should, be exported to other forests. The authors provide good practical detail on how and where to erect the boxes, and also consider the implications for barn owl conservation elsewhere.

In short, a handy, concise, instructive review of a good technique which should receive wide application.

Ian Bainbridge

***Birds and Forestry** by Mark Avery and Roderick Leslie; T & A D Poyser 1990 299pp; £18.00*

This is an important book which will be of interest to both ornithologists and foresters alike, for it helps to describe the ideas and objectives of the groups involved in the conservation debate on this issue over recent years. This debate has been based on a mixture of scientific fact and, at times, less reasoned opinion and this book has made an honourable attempt to cut through some of the problems caused by this approach. It asks appropriate questions and at times explains that the real answers are not known.

The change in ownership to Academic Press does not seem to have affected the quality of presentation; this book has all the features of the now collectable Poyser series. It is different, however, in one respect. Previous books in the series have been firmly centred on birds, their status, identification or ecology. *Birds and Forestry* moves into the management and political field.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The chapter on forest birds explains how forest succession, size of forest, tree species, altitude and structure influence the composition of bird populations found within our plantations. From this context the conservation importance of plantations in Britain is evaluated and their importance to a number of rarer species is highlighted eg. a very significant proportion of Scottish nightjars is now confined to forest clear-fell sites.

There is a long section on forest management which will be useful to those who are not familiar with the practices used to establish and manage forests. With recent changes in technology and policy, some of this section already requires updating. Conservation management of forests is covered in a useful chapter which outlines some of the methods of changing the apparently barren first rotation plantations into forests with significant wildlife interest.

The following two chapters cover the crux of recent debate – afforestation of bare ground, its perceived effects, the open country birds at risk, and the difficulty of making value judgements whether a greenshank is more important than a goshawk.

There are a series of case studies covering the lowland pine forests of Thetford, the mixed forests of the North York Moors, the afforestation in the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland, and the spruce forests of Galloway. It is disappointing from a Scottish context that this last case seems a little rushed and poorly researched, although it does cover the important aspects of the raven decline and the success with barn owls.

The book concludes with chapters on the financing of upland forestry and other upland land use and one on future policy and direction.

Overall this book, along with a Forestry Commission publication (FC Occasional Paper 26; *Forest Bird Communities* by S.J. Petty and M.I. Avery 1990), released at the same time, provides a detailed account of the challenges being faced by conservationists and foresters. Both publications also draw attention to the lack of knowledge of forest bird populations – perhaps next time we pick up our binoculars we should head for the woods rather than the coast!

David C. Jardine

RED DATA BIRDS IN BRITAIN

compiled by the NCC and RSPB

The various Red Data Books have set the standards for recognising birds close to, or at risk of extinction worldwide. This book by focussing on vulnerable species living in or visiting Britain, sets out to define the British situation and to clearly establish both the importance of British populations and our responsibilities for contributing to bird conservation.

December 1990, 300 pages
ISBN: 0.85661.056.9, £18.00

BIRDS OF THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR

Clive Finlayson

Clive Finlayson, presents a fascinating account of the Strait of Gibraltar and its resident and transitory bird life. Coverage includes the area and geographical characteristics that make it a suitable crossing place, the migration patterns of the principle passage species showing how weather and visibility affect the route and timing of the crossing, and the ornithology of the entire peninsula is summarized.

August 1991, c. 384 pages
ISBN: 0.85661.066.6
£18.50 (tentative)

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24-28 Oval Road
London NW1 7DX
Telephone: 071-267-4466

Birds of the Outer Hebrides by Peter Cunningham; Mercat Press 1991; 243pp; £8.95.

Updated edition of *Birds of the Outer Hebrides*. A concise, up to date account of nearly 300 species which have occurred in the Outer Hebrides, based on the author's observations spanning more than 40 years. Where possible, both Gaelic and scientific names of birds are provided and the text is accompanied by some delightful line drawings. This book may be used as a standard against which future records and changes can be judged.

The Good Birdwatcher's Guide by Peter Jennings; Ficedula Books 1991; 482pp; £9.95.

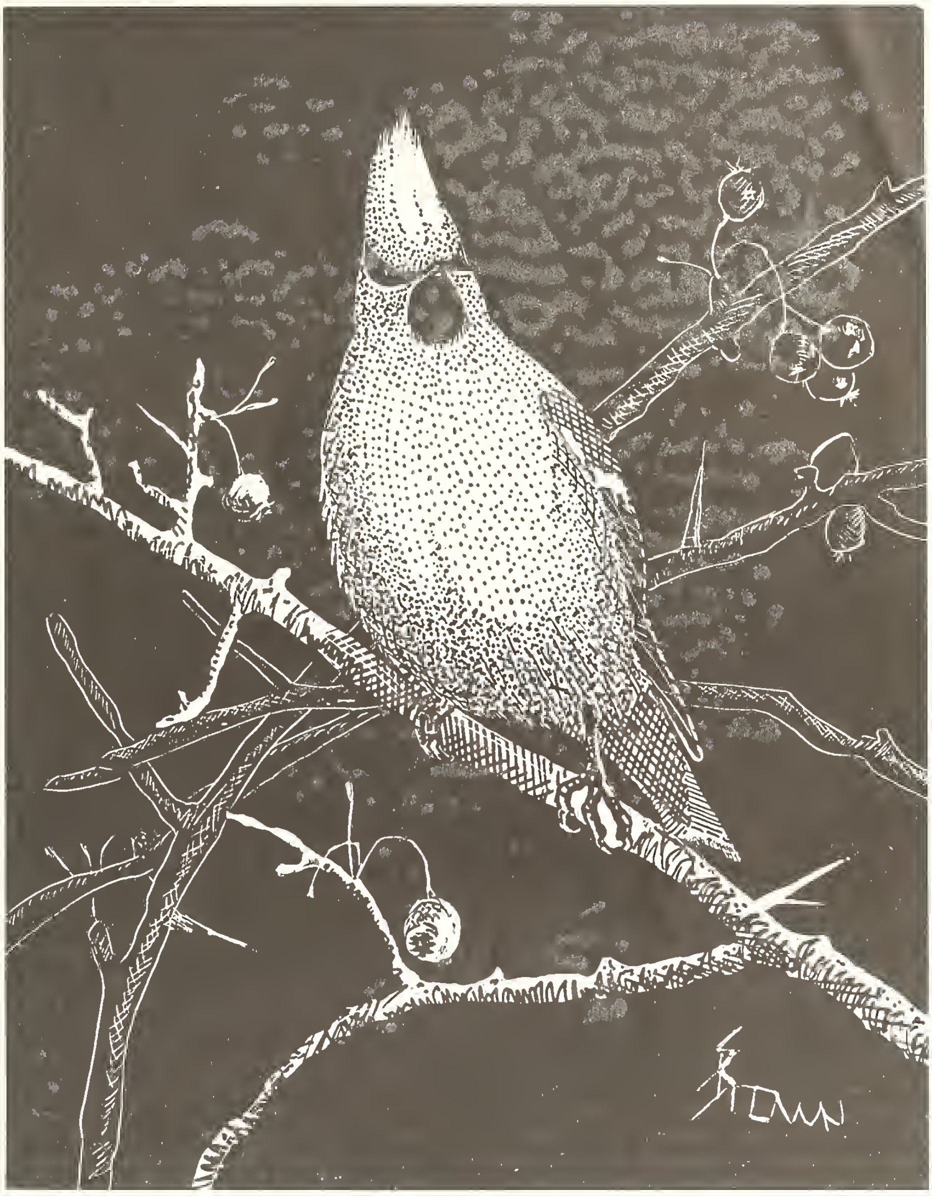
The *Good Birdwatcher's Guide* gives detailed information about birdwatching sites in Britain with a total of 636 in Scotland. It also gives information such as the nearest Youth Hostels, Tourist Information Centres, Hostels/Bunkhouses and B & Bs. A valuable book for the traveller.

'L'Avifaune du Cap Corse' – written and published by J-F Marzocchi; 41pp, colour illustrations. No price quoted.

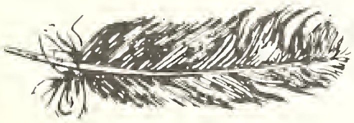
A useful booklet for anyone going to Corsica, listing all species seen in the Cap Corse area since 1988.

'Die Vogelwelt' – special edition numbers 1 and 2 1991.

The German ornithological journal has produced a special survey dealing with Corncrakes throughout Europe. Although most articles are in German with English summaries, they include four in English.



Waxwing *Steven Brown*



Alcoholic Scandinavian visitors

Waxwings are very special. It is always a great treat to find one of these exotic birds, and to see whole flocks of them is quite splendid. I had not, however, realised just quite how special these winter visitors really are until I read an article in the most recent issue of *Fugle*, the magazine of the Danish Ornithologists' Club (DOF). Here Poul Hansen, Curator of Natural Sciences at Aarhus Museum describes the curious diet of the waxwing.

As most readers will know, waxwings breed in the more northerly latitudes of the subarctic zone, choosing low lying areas with a good cover of pine and birch scrub. Their favourite nest site seems to be old, stunted pine trees covered in witch-hair lichen. Here they feed on insects, especially mosquitoes, which they catch like flycatchers by launching themselves from tree top perches.

However, as the year passes, the mass of available insects decreases and the waxwings gradually change to an alternative diet composed mostly of berries, especially rowan, thorn and elder. As Poul Hansen explains, if there is enough food around their breeding sites, they will remain there all year round. Only when they run short of food do waxwings migrate.

It is these migrating Scandinavian waxwings which end up in Britain and numbers obviously vary greatly from year to year. Poul Hansen also describes how many of the birds on their return tend to stop to breed further south than the place from which they set out, thus, presumably, lowering population densities by extending their distribution. There is also some indication that certain areas become unsuitable as breeding grounds after a time, although more remains to be discovered about this.

The final paragraphs of the article, under the heading *The Daily Spirit Ration* are here translated in full:

"Being a berry eater like the waxwing brings with it very particular problems. During the winter, the starch in many berries is transformed into sugar, which in time turns to alcohol. On a cold day, a single waxwing might eat berries totalling up to three times its own weight. This great intake of food is due to the fact that the berries are only partially digested. Much of this food goes undigested through the rather short intenstine of the waxwing. The alcohol, however, is easily absorbed through the wall of the digestive tract, which means that in winter the waxwing has a substantial daily intake of alcohol.

So, when we find a dead waxwing under a window in the garden, it is tempting to think that the bird has collided with the window in a super-intoxicated state. However, this is unlikely to be the case, because waxwings are adapted to an exceptional intake of alcohol. Their liver is very large compared to that of other birds and is able to break down the alcohol much faster than other animals (including humans).

This might seem an enviable ability, although on second thought, considering the price of alcohol ...."

(from *Fugle*:1991,1)

Résumé and translation by Anne-Marie Smout

SOC Notices

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 1991 (£30 1st, £20 2nd, £10 3rd) were:
January: C.K. Mylne, Linlithgow; A. Duncan, Aberdeen and A. Anderson, Newburgh.
February: D. MacIver, Stornoway; A.D.K. Ramsay, Tain and Miss M.D. Smith, Stirling.
March: Miss S. Scott, Dundee: Miss J.M. Lawson, Edinburgh and R. Seath, Aberdour.

The 200 Club has just started its third year helping to refurbish the SOC premises at 21 Regent Terrace and the SOC is extremely grateful for our support. There is still room for new members, so do please join. Either send me a cheque for £12 (payable to 'SOC 200 Club') for this year's subscription or fill in a standing order form which I can supply and you will be entered in next month's draw. Please write to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. 089 682 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Endowment fund grants 1991

The end of the Club's commitments to the new breeding atlas project has allowed endowment fund grants for amateur research projects to be made available in 1991. A total of £1,500 has been allocated to a variety of projects. These include studies of mute swans in eastern Scotland and various raptor surveys including merlins in Angus and southern Scotland and hen harriers in Argyll.

Seabird monitoring studies in the Firth of Forth and the Fife atlas project are also being supported. Further flung studies include investigation of great skua dispersal in Shetland and a search for the wintering grounds of Scottish breeding dotterel in Morocco. All grants are subject to the submission of brief reports on the results within three months of the completion of fieldwork.

1991 Scottish Ringers Conference

Organised this year by Highland Ringing Group over the weekend 22/24th November at the Fyfe Arms Hotel, Braemar. Further details from:– **John Carruthers, c/o RSPB, Highland Office, Munlochy, Ross & Cromarty.**

New address for S.B.R.C.

Ron Forrester, Secretary of the Scottish Birds Records Committee has recently changed address and all correspondence for the committee should now be sent to: **Ron Forrester, Secretary, S.B.R.C., 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD. tel 0700 505352.**

Thanks

The March SBN was packed with the assistance of Rosemary Davidson, Phylis Berry, Mary Black, Margaret Bell, Margaret Mowat, Eleanor Hurley and Mrs Peace; their help was very much appreciated. Bob Smith has also helped again with more woodwork and general maintenance at No. 21.

'Scottish Birds' Binding

Members who wish to have their copies of *'Scottish Birds'* bound should apply to **Riley Dunn & Wilson, Glasgow Road, Falkirk FK1 4HP (tel 0324 21591).** The prices quoted are £11.42 per volume in red buckram or £16.73 per volume in quarter leather plus return postage.

Scottish Birds Records Committee – election of new member

In 1990 S.B.R.C. commenced a rotation, with one member now retiring each year. Roy Dennis is due to stand down in November 1991 and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Eric Meek, a highly regarded birdwatcher living in Orkney.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 31st July 1991, being signed by both a proposer and seconder who must both be S.O.C. members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all S.O.C. Local Recorders will be invited to vote. **Ron Forrester, Secretary, S.B.R.C., 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD.**

Editing of SBN

When Stalin died in 1953, it was felt that no one person could run the Soviet Union and that he should be replaced by a three-man team. While one would hesitate to draw too close an analogy between Uncle Joe and Uncle Stan, the departure of Stan da Prato from the editorship of SBN has left us with a similar problem and a similar solution. Stan's knowledge of the nuts and bolts of publishing has been inherited by Sylvia Laing, his academic expertise echoed by Dr Kate Thompson and the mantle of his literary persona adopted by Michael Murphy, who understands about commas and full stops. Any of us is available to answer queries about SBN and to encourage you to keep the articles rolling in. We will miss Stan, and are glad to know that he will still be available, work permitting, with his invaluable advice and encouragement.

Can you help?

Scottish Birds 14/1 (Summer 1986) is out of print, but copies are needed for exchange with other libraries. We will be grateful for any copies that members no longer need, and will gladly pay postage costs. Please send to **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.**

Scottish Wildlife Trust Ecology and Conservation courses

SWT is running a series of week-end training courses in ecology and conservation. The programme runs through from now until next March. Details are available from **Dan Hunt, 5 Calton Hill, Edinburgh EH1 3BJ (tel: 031 557 5262).**

1991 raffle

It is raffle time again. The 1990 raffle raised approximately £1,400, not bad for Tayside Branch's first attempt. I am asking all members and branch secretaries for a big effort this year to see if we can raise £2,000. I propose making the first prize £150. Please send any donations and prizes to me at: **23a Rattray Street, Monifieth, Dundee DD5 4JU.**

Ian McIntosh

Small ads

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Report 1990

This is now available from 21 Regent Terrace at £3.50 including p.&p.

Birds of the Outer Hebrides

Updated edition now available from Mercat Press, James Thin Ltd., 53/9 South Bridge, Edinburgh.

A Hebridean Naturalist

Acair Ltd, James Street, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis.

Sales Items

SOC Sweatshirt Navy with pocket-size SOC logo. Small, Medium, Large and Ex Large.	£10.50
SOC Ties Polyester with repeat SOC motif. Navy, Maroon, Drk Green & Drk Brown.	£5.95
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SOC Car Sticker Plastic, self-adhesive SOC motif.	£ .75
SOC Fieldlist A pocket-sized checklist of all species regularly occurring in Scotland. New reduced price.	£ .50
SOC Checklist An annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. New reduced price.	£ 1.00

All prices include post and packing (except overseas – add £1.50) **SOC (Sales) 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).**

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:
Adult £12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00
Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC
Printed by Ritchie of Edinburgh, 163 Bonnington Road, Edinburgh EH6 5RE

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THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish
Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1991 No. 23
ISSN 0268-3200

Edited by Sylvia Laing,
Michael Murphy and
Kate Thompson

Spotlight on Estuaries

NOV 12 1991

Estuaries, while being regarded as veritable Meccas by winter birdwatchers, are unfortunately more commonly perceived as wastelands fit only for rubbish disposal, urban and industrial development, or at best, sites for marinas. Time is running out for Britain's estuaries and their plight has been the focus of substantial recent attention from conservation organisations. Both the NCC and RSPB have recently published major reports on the conservation of British estuaries which paint a depressing picture of continuing habitat erosion and lack of effective planning or control.

Oystercatchers flighting into high tide roost

In Great Britain there are 165 estuaries, one third in Scotland, and 48% of the British shoreline is estuarine. Eleven British estuaries exceed 10,000 Ha in area including the Firths of Tay, the Moray and Dornoch Firths and the Solway Firth. Estuaries are of high conservation value because of their very nature. At the margin of the land and sea with regular influxes of fresh and salt waters they contain a mosaic of diverse habitats regularly resupplied with nutrients. At their core are intertidal and subtidal mud and sand flats, salt marshes, tidal reed beds and lagoons. Peripheral habitats such as sand dunes, shingle banks or grazing marshes complete the habitat mosaic which is the key to the particularly high conservation value of estuaries. Estuaries are associated with a rich assemblage of wildlife, most notably vast wintering or migrating flocks of wildfowl and waders which find both feeding and roosting grounds within the estuarine ecosystem. Estuaries are also important to rare species of plants and invertebrates. *Primula scotica* is one British endemic closely associated with estuarine habitats. Estuaries also provide nursery grounds for fish such as sole and plaice and are used by sea mammals such as harbour porpoises, seals and otters.

Britain's estuaries assume an international conservation significance because of their vital importance to wintering and migrating waterfowl. Overy forty species of waders and wildfowl occur regularly on British estuaries in winter. In January there are over 500 thousand wildfowl and 1 million waders on British estuaries. Over 50% of the NW European populations of knot, bar-tailed godwit, sanderling, turnstone and redshank are found on British estuaries in January. In Scotland, over 200,000 waders, including almost 10% of the NW Europe populations of oystercatchers, knot and redshank, winter on estuaries. Over 170,000 wildfowl are supported by the Forth, Montrose Basin, Solway and Moray Firths. British estuaries are also vital staging posts for migrating waders in spring and autumn and provide safe havens for moulting birds such as mute swans at Montrose Basin and shelduck on the Forth.

The conservation problem arises because estuaries are also of value to man. For centuries they have been used as sources of food such as wildfowl and shellfish. In more recent centuries vast conurbations have developed around estuaries and over one third of the British population now live in towns or cities around estuaries. While increased nutrient input associated with urban sewage outfalls can increase invertebrate biomass in intertidal areas, this is outweighed by industrial pollution and extensive land reclamation for ports, industrial and residential sites, roads and other infrastructure. More recently, the growth of the leisure industry has increased pressure on Britain's estuaries. Proposals for tidal power barrages are another looming threat.

The pressures on British estuaries are both diverse and intense and current safeguards are inadequate. Ecologically, estuaries are functional units within which habitat diversity is a key component of their conservation value. Despite this, the considerable range of human activities associated with estuaries (over 250 identified by the NCC) has caused responsibility for estuarine management to become fragmented. No fewer than 33 different bodies including local planning authorities, DAFS, DoE, Home Office, NCC(S) and the Crown Estate Commissioners are variously responsible for different aspects of their management. In particular, the generally rigid demarcation in responsibility for activities in the marine and terrestrial environment creates problems for conservation in estuaries, as well as for the rest of the British coastline. This fragmentation of responsibility allows for some worrying loopholes in the protective net. For instance, local planning decisions can be overturned by the use of Parliamentary Private Bills where proposed developments affect statutory rights of access or navigation. Such Private Bills are not subject to any Environmental Impact Assessment procedures. The role of the Crown Estate Commissioners, who control over 50% of the coastline between the mean low and mean high water marks, is also particularly pertinent. The CECs' statutory duties are primarily financial, "to maintain and enhance the value of the Estate and the return obtained from it" and the Estate's net income is passed to the Treasury.

The situation is rendered yet more complex by the international aspects of the conservation significance of British estuaries. Estuaries are hemmed round by a plethora of international designations and directives, notably the Ramsar convention and the Specially Protected Areas network established under the EC Birds Directive. National and local provisions such as NNRs, SSls, and LNRs also apply to many estuaries (cf. SBN 21, March 1991). Despite this apparent wealth of protective measures, the actual degree of protection afforded to our estuaries is limited. To date, although 14 Scottish estuaries have been identified as potential Ramsar sites and SPAs, only two, Gruinart and Bridgend flats on Islay, have actually been designated. Of 32 estuarine sites included in the British Ramsar/SPA network, 26 are currently suffering habitat losses, due mainly to land claim. Between 1986 and 1989, 17% of estuarine SSSIs were damaged.

The conservation lobby is generally in favour of an integrated approach to estuarine conservation management with much tougher statutory protection for key habitats and their associated wildlife. The buzz phrases are National Coastal Strategy and Coastal Zone Management (CZM). The aim of CZM is to promote environmentally sensitive sustainable use of coastal resources through an integrated planning approach designed to resolve conflicts of use. A government department with national responsibility for strategic coastal planning, plus increased statutory duties and powers to enable local authorities to implement this on the ground, are seen as the way forward by conservation groups. The problem lies in generating the political will necessary to achieve these aims in the ever decreasing time available. Progressive habitat loss through land claim for waste disposal and infrastructure development has already affected over 85% of British estuarine with an overall loss of 25% of intertidal habitat over the past 200 years. The inner Forth alone has lost 50% of its area to land claim for agriculture, ports, industry and waste disposal, over 300Ha since 1950. In the words of the NCC's summary report "without sympathetic and imaginative future treatment of (estuarine) ecosystems, it seems inevitable that the piecemeal and cumulative damage and destruction of estuaries and their wildlife by a wide variety of activities and developments will continue. The estuarine resource is one of Britain's most valuable natural assets. We can no longer afford to treat is as wasteland".

Davids, N.C., 1991, *Estuaries, wildlife and man.* A summary of nature conservation and estuaries in Great Britain. Peterborough, NCC.
Rothwell, P. & Housden, S. 1990. *Turning the tide; a future for estuaries.* Sandy, RSPB. £3 in. p&p.

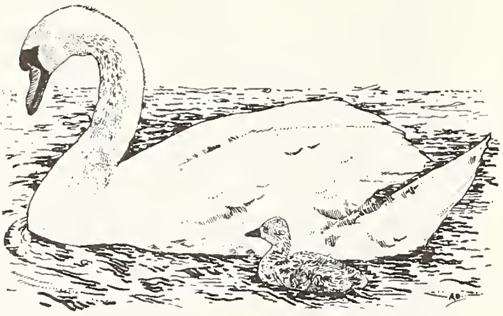
Kate Thompson

Hard facts on the conservation significance of habitats such as those found in estuaries are essential to the success of conservationists' campaigns. If you would like to do your bit for estuarine conservation by joing the band of hardy, early rising volunteers who regularly count wintering wildfowl, or waders on Scotland's estuaries, please contact Jeff Kirby, at WWT, Slimbridge, Gloucester or Ray Waters at BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, for further information.

Scottish mute swan census 1990

In 1990 the SOC organised the Scottish side of a national mute swan census in association with the BTO and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. The aim of the census was to produce an estimate of the total mute swan population of Great Britain in order to asess any changes since the 1978 and 1983 surveys and to provide a base for future monitoring. The survey recorded breeding pairs primarily in April/May and non-breeding flocks in April.

The response to the survey, despite the competing demands of the final year of the Breeding Atlas Project, was very encouraging. Information is still awaited from Aberdeen, Argyll, Benbecula and the Uists and Kincardine and Deeside but the indication from those areas in which data have been returned suggests that not only did thorough coverage occur in many areas but that the mute swan population has shown a definite and significant increase since 1983 in most areas.



Mute Swan and cygnet

Provisional figures from the data returned suggest 750 territorial/breeding pairs and 1870 non-breeders – a total of 3370 birds. This figure is already above our 1983 estimate of 3250 birds for Scotland. Some adjustment will be made to these figures once the data are analysed in detail and we cannot yet present area comparisons between 1983 and 1990 as the data were collected on a 10Km sq basis. However, our provisional estimate for the missing areas (based on 1983 data) would suggest possibly another 255 pairs and 655 non-breeders (1165 birds in total) giving an estimated population of 4535 birds. A final figure of approximately 4600 birds is not impossible, which would be by far the highest ever recorded Scottish population of mute swan.

A full analysis of the results will appear in Scottish Birds in due course once all area data have been received. All those who contributed to the survey both organisers and fieldworkers, are greatly thanked for their efforts. If you have any additional information for 1990 which you think may be of value please forward this to us. ***Allan and Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife KY15 4UG.***

Allan Brown

Natural Heritage (Scotland)

At the end of June the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991 received Royal assent, following a final stormy session in the House of Commons. The main purpose of this Act is to establish the new Government Conservation Agency – Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which will replace the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland. However, the biggest controversy centred around what is now Section 12 of the new Act, which sets up an Advisory Committee separate from SNH to consider objections from landowners to Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Despite many letters from conservationists urging them to stand firm in defence of SSSIs, and their own assurances at earlier stages of this Bill that they would do just that, the Government were forced to establish this extra Committee by pressure from their own back-benchers in the House of Lords who were threatening to cause the collapse of the whole Bill. The new Committee will be appointed by the Secretary of State (after the 1st April 1992 when SNH comes into existence) and will advise SNH on questions relating to the scientific interest of SSSIs, just as NCCS does at present, but it must "receive and consider" the advice of the new Committee on disputed sites. The fear is that this will inevitably mean downgrading some sites, since if the Committee's advice were always ignored what would be the point of having it?

It is worth repeating here that SSSIs have never at any time automatically imposed conditions on owners or occupiers of land within them; they simply set up consultation procedures which must be gone through if certain specified changes are proposed to the management of sites. Thereafter, if the owner or occupier and the conservation agency cannot agree, the Secretary of State becomes the final arbiter, deciding what should be done in the national interest. If he decides, or if the other parties agree without reference to him, that development should be curtailed for the sake of conservation, then the conservation agency can compensate owners for this. Many such management agreements are in existence around the country, but the sad thing is that they only come about if the owner threatens to do something damaging to the site.

The system has basically been designed around conflict, and the fear is that the new Section 12 will continue this by promoting more disputes over SSSIs rather than better conservation. There are currently some 1300 SSSIs in Scotland, and several hundred of these could be eligible for reference to the new Committee as soon as it is appointed. It is unclear how it would deal with so many, since no provision has been made in the Act for it to have any scientific staff, nor to commission any research to clarify competing claims about the interest of the site. The irony is that by giving in to landowner pressure in this way the Government may well have prevented SNH from taking badly needed new positive initiatives in the countryside by having to devote too much of its resources to disputed cases.

David Minns, RSPB

Bird watching in the Blairgowrie area of Perthshire

Blairgowrie, in the Strathmore valley in Perthshire, is the ideal base for bird-watching. The town, sitting on the banks of the River Ericht, is surrounded by coniferous and deciduous woodlands, mixed farmland, lots of rough patches and hedgerows and about a dozen lochs within easy reach.

The River Ericht itself is good for breeding dippers, pied and grey wagtails and common sandpipers. In the spring, male and female goosanders are nearly always present, but the red-breasted merganser is not recorded very often. Kingfishers are often spotted – usually as a flash of orange and aquamarine! The River Tay near Meikleour, is good for breeding common terns, ringed plover and common gulls.

South of the town, the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) reserve of Stormont Loch is good for wintering wildfowl, especially teal, goldeneye and wigeon. Tufted duck and shoveler are present in smaller numbers. Sometimes pintail and gadwall drop in for a few days and on one occasion, a very handsome male smew stayed for at least a month.

Ruddy duck have become established breeders on this loch over the past three or four years and, because pochard are now on the Rare Breeding Birds lists, I was particularly pleased to see a female with seven young this year.

There is a considerable stretch of willow carr on the west side of Stormont, which makes it difficult to assess coot and moorhen numbers, but they seem to be rather poorly represented. Canada geese are becoming regulars on most of the lochs in the area, with Stormont holding about a dozen. Water rails have also been recorded here. Great crested grebe and litte grebe occasionally breed in the area, but the beautiful Slavonian grebe, alas, is seen only on passage.

The Strathmore valley is particularly good for greylag geese, but over the past two winters, increasing numbers of pinkfeet have appeared in the area which was formerly exclusive greylag territory. Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust dawn goose counts have established that Clunie and Marlee Lochs, to the west of Blairgowrie, and also the River Tay at Kercock, hold the highest number of geese in the district. Over the winters of 1990 and 1991, Marlee Loch has had a solitary snow goose which fraternises with the greylags. Because the geese from Marlee tend to "hedge-hop" into the adjacent fields to feed, good opportunities are afforded to search for ringed birds and "odd-bods", using a telescope.

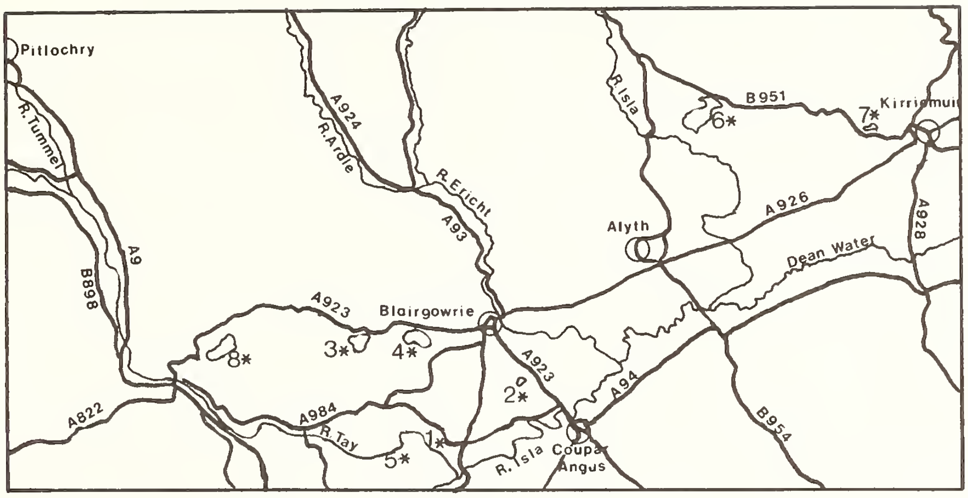
Mute swans hold territories on most of the lochs, but Lintrathen Reservoir, a SWT reserve, is excellent for whooper swans. In January 1991, 96 birds, including a few cygnets, flew in at dusk to roost on the water immediately in front of the hide! Their approach was heralded by their lonely, evocative bugling and the beauty of these birds, seen against the sunset on the snow and ice, was memorable.

If the water level is low exposing the mud, this reservoir can have a few dunlin and redshank on passage and hundreds of lapwing. Last year, an American green-winged teal was present for a short time. Superb views of breeding black-necked grebe can be had at the RSPB reserve of Kinnordy, near Kirriemuir, 15 miles east of Blairgowrie. There is also a good colony of black-headed gulls here.

In the woodlands, blue, great, coal and long-tailed tits are regularly seen, as are treecreepers, goldcrests, great spotted and green woodpeckers. Crossbills, those most attractive birds, used to be quite rare, but over the past few years, there has been a marked increase in numbers. Spotted flycatchers appear to be on the decline at the moment and redstarts are only occasionally seen, but siskins are recorded increasingly frequently. Jays are also present in the district, but numbers are quite low – possibly because most farms and estates have sporting interests. However, carrion crows seem to be very successful breeders, despite the gamekeepers' attentions!

Presumably because there is a dearth of natural nesting holes, a large colony of jackdaws uses rabbit holes. There are also a few rookeries within a four mile radius of Blairgowrie, the largest having 80-100 nests.

BLAIRGOWRIE AREA MAP



1 = Meikleour
2 = Stormont Loch
3 = Clunie Loch
4 = Marlee Loch
5 = Kercock
6 = Lintrathen Reservoir
7 = Loch of Kinnordy
8 = Loch of the Lowes

The much-maligned magpie is a rarity in these parts and it is a bonus if one is recorded. Starlings in their thousands are a spectacular sight as they flock to roost in the reed beds west of the town. Swallows and sand martins on passage also use these reeds to roost in.

There are many hedgerows and small patches of scrub which hold interesting passerines such as yellowhammers, reed buntings, redpolls, linnets, bullfinches, greenfinches, chaffinches and the very colourful goldfinch, with its delightful tinkling call. Willow warblers, garden warblers, blackcaps and whitethroats also frequent these scrubby woodlands and the noisy sedge warbler can be heard, if not seen, in the reeds fringing any of the lochs. The wood warbler, with its distinctive song, is very scarce. There

Long-tailed-tit feeding young at nest *Arthur Gilpin* is a good mix of fruit-bearing trees in the hedgerows with elder, rowan and hawthorn providing an abundance of food, not only for the migrant redwings and fieldfares, but for the resident blackbirds, song thrushes and mistle thrushes as well.

Sparrowhawks and kestrels take advantage of rough ground also, and at dusk in spring, roding woodcock are common. Unfortunately the great grey shrike is seldom recorded.

There is a nestbox population of tree sparrows, which in 1991, for the first time in ten years, has shown a decline in nesting attempts. This is, perhaps, due to the cold wet weather, or it may be that the population has peaked and the numbers are now on the decline. They can be seen feeding on stubble in the company of bramblings and snow buntings in a ''good bird winter''.

Tawny owls regularly use nestboxes for breeding; long-eared owls are sometimes located but sadly, the beautiful barn owl is never seen at all now. They did breed in the district up to 1978, and, as the land-use has not since changed, I suspect that this was an isolated population which could not sustain itself when the owls sometimes became road casualties. Short-eared owls and buzzards also breed and hunt over the extensive heather moorlands to the north of the town.

On these moorlands too there are breeding golden plovers, with their evocative plaintive call. The plovers are pretty thin on the ground, but in the spring the air is filled with the sound of calling and drumming snipe. Curlews are quite plentiful, cuckoos are recorded often and meadow pipits and larks are abundant! if you are really lucky, you may spot hen harriers, merlins, stonechats and whinchats. Capercaillie have disappeared completely from the area now, but blackcock and red grouse are faring a little better on the moors where blaeberries are present.

Because of the paucity of sand quarries in the area, sand martins nest mainly in suitable banks on the River Ericht, although in 1989, one face of a large pile of lime in an agricultural contractor's yard was taken over. This contractor was very concerned in case the nests were destroyed, so he took steps to ensure that no lime was removed while the birds were in residence. Swallows nest in a variety of sites, swifts prefer older houses with plenty of gaps below the eaves but house martins are not nearly so common.

At the moment, there are more acres of farmland sown with spring rather than winter cereals, so breeding lapwings and oyster-catchers are quite common. They also nest in raspberry fields where the canes are up to 1 year old. Robins, dunnocks, wrens and collared doves frequent local gardens and stock doves may be seen on farmland.

To top all of this off, ten miles west of Blairgowrie is the SWT reserve of Loch of the Lowes, where good views of breeding osprey may be had from the hide. There was a welcome return of these birds this year after an absence of eight years. In short, Blairgowrie and its environs are a bird-watcher's paradise.

Sandra R Hacker

Editor's note: The district described in Sandra's article is covered by sheet 53 in the OS Landranger series. The SWT publish a handbook for all their reserves; further details may be obtained from SWT, 25 Johnson Terrace, Edinburgh.

Osprey success at Loch of Lowes

A new pair of ospreys has taken up residence at Loch of Lowes in Perthshire for the first time since 1982, when the male bird became involved in a disastrous love triangle with a second female. The pair has chosen the artificial eyrie constructed by wildlife artist Keith Brockie. Excellent views of the nest can be obtained from the observation hide at the side of the loch.

Ospreys have also returned to nest at the famous Loch Garten site, and congratulations are in order to the RSPB for achieving completion of a new visitor centre at the site following an arson attack at the end of last year when the centre was burnt to the ground.

Successful artificial Osprey eyrie
Forestry Commission

Flying the flag for the SOC in Germany

We have received a cutting from the ''Rheinische Post'' of 21 March prominently featuring an SOC sweatshirt! The occasion was the presentation of a prize to the winners of a competition entitled ''Youth Research''. Peter Mullen, one of our junior members resident in Germany, together with a young German friend, won third prize in the biology section and also gained the Environmental Protection Prize for the whole of North Rhine Westphalia, an area with 10 million inhabitants.

We were pleased to see that Peter opted to wear his sweatshirt for the occasion, and were interested to read of his success. Keep up the good work!

Endowment Fund Grants

The Endowment Fund grant administered by the Club has been a valuable source of financial aid to many individuals and groups for a number of years in support of their ornithological fieldwork. Grants were suspended during the 1988-90 period to allow funding to be channelled into the Scottish organisation of the Breeding Atlas Project. In 1991, however, funds were once again available and in March Council agreed to support 13 projects ranging from a contribution to a rat eradication programme on Ailsa Craig, studies of merlins in Angus and Lothian, mute swans in eastern Scotland and great skuas in Shetland.

The purpose of the Endowment Fund is to support amateur research work, either single year studies or longer term projects. Full time research projects such as PhDs are not eligible. Funding generally helps to cover transport and accommodation costs, but the purchase of equipment for organisations such as ringing groups has been supported in addition to schemes complementing research activities (eg. the rat eradication programme on Ailsa Craig).

In most years the request for funds exceeds the money available (usually between £1,500 – £2,000) and the grant requests have either to be pruned or preference given to particular projects. This may depend upon an assessment of the scientific value of the application, its probable contribution to ornithological knowledge and the likelihood of the stated project objectives actually being fulfilled. Applications must also be of relevance to Scottish ornithology. All grants are subject to the submision of a brief report of the results within 3 months of the completion of fieldwork and it is hoped that detailed reports will eventually be submitted for publication in either Scottish Birds or Scottish Bird News.

At a meeting in March 1991 Council requested the Surveys and Research Committee, which processes the grant applications before submission to Council, to prepare formal guidelines on the assessment of Endowment Fund grants. The draft paper will be prepared soon for submission to the November meeting of Council, but I would be pleased to receive comments from members and/or recipients of the grants as to the effectiveness of the present grant scheme and any changes which might be considered in its format. For instance, three year grants have been approved in recent years, but does this affect the flexibility of the scheme? Should the funds support major single projects rather than a diverse range of schemes? Any comments will be greatly appreciated and taken into account when the proposed guidelines are referred to Council.

Finally, now is the time to be planning fieldwork projects for 1992. In order to enable the Surveys and Research Committee to give full consideration to grant applications, Council agreed at its meeting in June 1991 that the closing date for the submission of grant applications should be the **end of November** each year (not **December** as previously) for consideration by the Council the following March. Application forms are available from 21 Regent Terrace. The Surveys and Research Committee is looking forward to being kept busy over Christmas and New Year!

Allan W Brown
Chairman, Surveys and Research Committee

Surveys and Research Committee

In recent years the work of the Surveys and Research Committee has been primarily involved in assessing Endowment Fund grant applications and overseeing the progess of the Scottish aspect of the new Atlas project. With the involvement in the latter now almost complete (although Jim Reid is continuing to work on the project in a voluntary capacity) the time has come to review the future role of the Committee. The aim should be to raise the profile of the Club through more direct involvement with fieldwork and Scottish based surveys, as well as continuing to vet Endowment Fund grant applications.

If any members have comments to make on the functioning of the Committee and the type of activity in which it and the Club should become involved and promote, I will be pleased to receive these for eventual consideration by Council.

At its meeting in June 1991, Council agreed the membership of the Committee comprising myself as chairman, Iain Gibson, David Jardine, Dr Mick Marquis, Wendy Mattingley and Dr Jim Reid. Thanks are extended to the retiring members Roy Dennis and Dr Mike Pienkowski for their contribution to the work of the Committee over the last few years. Council agreed also that members would serve on the Committee for a maximum of five years, but eligible for re-election after a one-year break, and that one member should retire each year. As I joined the Committee in 1987 and became Chairman in 1988 my time may soon be up!

Allan W Brown
Chairman, Surveys and Research Committee

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Nightjar with chick in SW Scotland *Edmund Fellowes*

Breeding nightjar survey 1992

The nightjar is a summer visitor to Britain which is declining in numbers throughout Europe. The breeding population in Britain is unlikely to exceed 2000 (1981).

Since the first nightjar enquiry of 1957/58, the overall trend has been one of marked decrease, particularly in the north and west. Although over 50% of the breeding population was recorded in the south-east of England, several other local concentrations existed and the remainder were thinly scattered, with very few birds in Wales and Scotland. The sparse distribution in Scotland is mainly on the west coast and western isles with the remainder along the north-east coast.

The principal objectives of this survey are to count and map the locations of all breedings nightjars and to make detailed descriptions of the habitats at nightjar breeding sites.

The survey will be jointly run by the BTO and RSPB, and will involve staff from both organisations as well as volunteers. Some work is already being done in 1991 to establish the best techniques and methodology to be used.

The survey will be organised through the BTO's regional representatives and anybody interested should contact their local representative or the BTO.

Oystercatcher in oak tree

The phone rang again this spring and a friend said "Hello Keith, yes the oystercatcher *(Haematopus ostralegus)* is back". Nothing too unusual about that, you might think, but this oystercatcher has its nest 25 feet up in an oak tree. This is the fourth year; presumably the same pair have used this nest site throughout.

The nest is in a fork of the tree where the birds, using their powerful beaks, have hammered away a hollow where the eggs are laid. Both eggs and bird are well sheltered and hidden from the elements. The birds have been successful each year and have hatched at least 2 of the 3 eggs each time.

During the winter of 1990/91 the tree was damaged in a storm which altered the nest site slightly, but after much deliberation the pair redesigned the nest site and hopefully will be successful again in 1991.

Back in 1988 a colleague pointed out another unusual nest site. Most books say that willow warblers *(Phylloscopus trochilus)* nest on the ground, but this one was 15 feet up in a wall of round hay bales and successfully raised 1 brood of young.

Keith Kirk

Colour ringed mute swans

A colour ringing scheme for mute swans has been in operation in eastern Scotland since 1982. This has involved ringing several hundred birds, primarily cygnets caught in August prior to fledging. A considerable amount of data has been gathered on movements, survival, return to natal areas to breed etc. East Scotland birds have been found to be very mobile prior to pairing and establishing a territory. For instance, Lothian birds have been recorded from sites as far apart as Berwick, Montrose, Strathbeg, Glasgow and even Islay.

Although many observations of ringed birds are received there seems little doubt that birds are overlooked or are assumed to have been recorded which is definitely not always the case. I moved recently to Fife from my Lothian study area and have found several birds breeding in the region which had not been recorded for 3-4 years. Please, therefore, submit any sightings of colour ringed mute swans. The east Scotland study uses white Darvic rings with three black letters read from the foot upwards and usually on the left leg; the usual metal BTO ring is on the right leg. All reports will be acknowledged and details of the bird's history forwarded to the reporter. Sightings should be sent to ***Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife KY15 4UG (Telephone: 0334 56804).***

(NB. A colour ringing scheme using blue Darvic rings with three white letters and numbers has been established in Northumberland and several of these birds have been recorded at east Scotland sites. Observations of these birds will also be welcome).

Allan Brown

Pollutants in Golden Eagle eggs

Organochlorine chemicals include compounds such as HEOD, DDT and DDE, which were formerly widely used in agricultural insecticides, and PCBs which are used in the manufacture of paints and other industrial products. Several small raptors in Britain such as peregrines and sparrowhawks suffered severe population declines during the 1950s and 1960s due to the detrimental effects of organochlorine residues on their ability to reproduce. Since the use of persistent organochlorine insecticides was banned in Britain the populations of such birds have largely recovered.

A recent paper (Newton & Galbraith, *Ibis 133, 115-120*) presents an overview of geographical and time trends in the occurrence of these chemicals and mercury in Scottish golden eagles' eggs. Between 1963 and 1986 a total of 234 addled or deserted eggs were analysed for organochlorine residues. Although the levels found were generally low, averaging under 1ppm for each chemical, several trends are apparent. Levels of all organochlorines were highest in the western coastal regions and lowest in the eastern Highlands with intermediate levels from western inland areas. These results reflect the lesser use of sheep dips and lower occurrence of sheep carrion in the diets of golden eagles in the eastern Highlands.

The relatively high levels of organochlorines, and mercury, in eggs from the west coast is also related to the consumption of seabirds by eagles in these areas. As top predators in the marine food chain, seabirds accumulate high levels of these compounds in their tissues. An analysis of data on diets, breeding success and levels of chemical residues in eggs from golden eagle territories on Rum several years ago indicated that predation on fulmars and kittiwakes in particular was associated both with high organochlorine and mercury levels in eggs and with low breeding success (Thompson, unpubl.) However, such findings are not necessarily indicative of a cause and effect relationship, but may simply arise from both breeding success and organochlorine levels being independently affected by diet.

HEOD levels declined significantly in eagle eggs from western Scotland from the late 1960s following the ban on the use of dieldrin ship dip from which HEOD derives. DDE levels also declined, but only significantly so in the east where egg shell thickness showed a coincident significant increase. By contrast, PCB levels have generally risen since the 1970s when first analyses for them were conducted. This reflects both the continuing use of these chemicals and their high level of persistence in the environment.

So, have these chemicals adversely affected the reproduction of golden eagles in Scotland? In general the organochlorine compound residue levels found in golden eagle eggs are less than those known to be required to affect reproduction in other raptors, but past HEOD levels were similar to those observed in peregrine eggs. The lack of any apparent reduction of the golden eagle breeding population during the period when peregrines declined may be a function of differences in these species' population dynamics. The longer natural lifespan of golden eagles and greater availability of surplus non breeders in their populations could effectively have masked short term reductions in survival rates.

Cock Capercaillie *Forestry Commission*

Capercaillie – threat of extinction

Numbers of the capercaillie, the largest member of the grouse family, have decreased markedly and it has already vanished from some areas.

The RSPB has begun a 3-year project to examine the birds' breeding biology and habitat requirements to try and establish the cause of the decline, and improve the management of their Abernethy Forest reserve. They are also participating in a joint project with the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, the Forestry Commission, the Game Conservancy, the Scottish Landowners' Federation and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to monitor the population in Scotland which could be as low as 2,000.

Scots Pine was once the dominant tree species over almost 1.5 million hectares of the Scottish Highlands. By the 1950s native pinewoods had been reduced to about 1% of their former range, 16,000 hectares. Since then 25% of this remnant has been lost because of clearfelling and underplanting with alien conifers, so that only about 12,000 ha now remain. The RSPB owns 1,571 ha of the native pinewood within its Abernethy Forest reserve on Speyside, which provides the ideal opportunity to carry out urgent research into the needs of the capercaillie.

A Woodland Grant Scheme from the Forestry Commission offers grants to support the natural regeneration and planting of Scots Pines in areas of native pinewood of which the commission maintains a register, and in additional areas agreed as suitable for extension of native pinewoods. This must be seen as a main priority if we are to save the capercaillie from extinction yet again in Scotland: they were reintroduced in the 19th century following their extinction in the middle of the 18th century.

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The 1991 Breeding Season Round-up

A fairly mild, wet and windy winter with a few cold spells mainly in January and February and the first snow fall of the winter in January. However, no really severe or prolonged frosts. April/May had a very high incidence of north/north-westerly winds, causing a very late cold spring; two late spells of snow down to 300 metres may well be reflected in the upland breeding birds' survival and breeding success. June was the 5th coldest and wettest at Leuchars since 1922, according to our weatherman on the spot, although 1987 was even worse!

Raptors and Owls

Two main factors have influenced a particularly bad breeding season for many of the raptors and owls; the very unusual weather pattern particularly during April and May, and the massive vole crash in south Scotland which had a detrimental effect on barn owls.

Peregrines in south Scotland suffered very badly due to the adverse cold weather conditions at the time of laying, resulting in very few nests being successful; in some other areas of Scotland egg laying was delayed and in some cases stopped for 2 to 3 weeks. With the exception of Ayrshire, thefts of peregrine eggs was fairly light, possibly due to the great fluctuations in laying dates no doubt frustrating the would be egg collector!

Golden eagles have also had a very poor season particularly in central Scotland with virtually no young raised, although according to Dave Dick this is thought to be due mainly to natural causes.

Hen harrier and merlin have also suffered due to the effects of the weather, although brood sizes were considerably smaller than normal. However, it is encouraging to note that in one area at least hen harrier occupation increased due to sympathetic keepering. In another study area merlin occupation was down from 15 sites in previous years to 9 this year, of which only 5 sites are still viable to date.

Barn owls laid relatively early, with large clutches being reported from Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbright and the Borders, before a crash in the vole population gave rise to very high chick mortality, even of 40/50 day old chicks. A few pairs are occupying sites on Arran this year; Derrick Warner reports that they appear to be doing well, along with long and short eared owls. His impression is shared in some other areas, with 20 pairs of short-eared owls reported in a Galloway forest. Tawny owls are doing well in Easter Ross and Central, despite predation by grey squirrels in the later; by contrast very few birds are calling in Fife. At Gordon Riddle's study area in Ayrshire he has noted that kestrels have had a very mixed late season, with nests in sheltered sites doing fairly well and exposed sites very badly.

Fledged Peregrine chick David Gowans

Seabirds

The news from Shetland was more hopeful this year with the reappearance of young sandeels and generally good weather heralding the best breeding season since 1983. Breeding numbers of auks, terns and kittiwakes were all much improved, with some kittiwake colonies up to 50% of their original strength. However, at the time of going to press in July, Peter Ellis was finding evidence of starvation among some large tern chicks and the Shetland colonies have a lot of ground to make up after the past 6 disastrous breeding seasons. In the Forth, the breeding season was generally rather late. However, on the Isle of May, guillemots, razorbills and gulls had a good season, as did early breeding puffins. However, shags and kittiwakes had a poor season with reduced numbers and breeding success. Tern numbers were the highest in recent years, but wet weather caused high mortality among newly hatched chicks. Elsewhere in the Forth, puffins continued to increase on Fidra and numbers of breeding shags and cormorants were generally good. Kittiwakes had mixed fortunes, however, with numbers up on Inchkeith but down for the second year running on the islands off North Berwick. On Canna, shags, gulls and kittiwakes all had a poor season. In the Southern Outer Isles, arctic and little tern numbers were significantly reduced from 1990 levels in many areas, but common term numbers were stable.

Common Sandpiper at nest Sidney Clark

Waders, Wildfowl and Waterside Birds

Lapwing, curlew, oystercatcher and redshank appear to have had a rough time throughout, with no successful breeding at Vane Farm on the shores of Loch Leven. In Easter Ross both lapwing and ringed plover failed at the small chick stage and in Skye dunlin were also very thin on the ground. There are no conclusive reports about any of the duck family or moorhens, although Allan Brown reports that the Lothian mute swans are continuing to expand despite the fact that weather and predation (mink suspected) have adversely affected survival rates.

A newly created pond in Fife has proved very successful for a black-headed gull colony.

Guillemots with 2 chicks. Note the one bridled adult

There are conflicting reports on dippers, grey and pied wagtails from different parts of the country; in some areas they did fairly well, while in others there were no birds in the area for the first time in six years.

Summer Migrants

Most of the warbler species appear to have had a poor season. Although it is unclear how much of this was due to the weather either on passage or in the wintering grounds, most birds were very late in arriving and some were entirely absent from some of the northern areas of Scotland, with little or no passage through Orkney. Some may have been staying around slightly further south, as a few reports suggest whitethroat numbers are better than previous years. They were well up at Vane Farm in contrast to there being no whinchats, wheatears or stonechats. Reduced coverage may have affected the recordings of lesser whitethroat numbers in East Lothian. A marked decrease in spotted flycatchers was noted throughout Scotland, coupled with extremely late arrival dates. In two study areas of central Scotland, Henry Robb recorded redstarts as being down by 50% and pied flycatcher by 15% while Mike Trubridge reckoned the breeding population of pied flycatchers at Inversnaid to be halved but with 14 unpaired males present.

Numbers of all the hirundines appear to be much reduced. One colony of 63 house martin nests last year was reduced to 45 this year in East Lothian. Sand martin colonies were up to 75% down on last year, and swallow numbers very sporadic.

Nightjars have been reported from only 2 areas in Scotland with the south west reporting good numbers of churring birds.

Over 70 male corncrakes have been recorded in Lewis and Harris this year compared to about 53 previously.

Other songbirds

Crossbills' main breeding season occured very early, and not surprisingly (considering the invasion of last winter) large numbers of young fledged this year. Good numbers of siskins were recorded, with 2 pairs fledging young in Orkney, only their 2nd or 3rd breeding record. Linnets and redpolls appear to have done reasonably well, although we have conflicting reports about goldcrests. Skylarks and yellowhammer in the Lochalsh area appear to be in low numbers.

The tit family in general appear to have had a poor year with only small broods fledged and young dying in the nest. Blackbirds were still breeding into July, which is fairly late.

Thanks to: Stuart Benn, Allan Brown, Ken Bruce, J Calledine, Martin Cook, Brian Cosnette, Andrew Currie, Dave Dick, Tim Dix, Peter Duncan, C Edwards, Norman Elkins, Pete Ellis, Brian Etheridge, S Fulford, Mike Harris, Alex Joss, P Knowling, Ian Langford, D Macdonald, Mary Matthews, Eric Meek, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Stan da Prato, Graham Rebecca, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, The Robertsons, Malcolm Ross, Geoff Shaw, Marion Shimeld, Bob Smith, Jim Stevenson, Bob Swann, Iain Taylor, Mike Trubridge, Sarah Wanless, Derrick Warner.

As always we stress that fieldworkers' first impressions are not to be interpreted as the definitive account of season 1991. That comes later when the appropriate bodies have analysed all the data. Many of the contributors to the summary you have just read are participants in the Common Bird Census or the Waterways Bird Survey organised by the BTO with backing from NCC.

Sylvia Laing
Kate Thompson

Male Crossbill feeding fledged young, Note gluey substance adhering to the bills, which is a mixture of seeds and saliva

Robert Smith

Sea eagle raise 7 young

The sea eagle is Britain's largest bird of prey with a wingspan of over 2 metres. It hunts over water and land, feeding on fish, seabirds and mammals.

Following a reintroduction programme from 1975 until 1985, during which a total of 82 young Norwegian white-tailed sea eagles were reared and released on the island of Rum, a National Nature Reserve off the west coast of Scotland, it is of great interest to note that four pairs have raised a record seven young at specially guarded sites in Scotland this year.

The sea eagle once bred in Scotland before being persecuted to extinction over 70 years ago. Eggs were first laid in 1983 and 1984 but failed to hatch. In 1985 the first sea eagle chick was raised followed by the same pair raising 2 chicks in 1986. Since then, chicks have been successfully reared every year but this year has been the most productive so far. "Although it is still too soon to judge the overall success of this project, this year's results are very promising. However, careful monitoring and protection will be needed for many years to come before this magnificent bird can truly be said to have returned."

These young are just reward for all the effort and goodwill put into the project from individuals and organisations both locally and internationally and in particular, John Love, to whom any records of sightings should be sent. *John Love, The Bank House, Balmacara, by Kyle of Lochalsh, Wester Ross, IV40 8DJ.*

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Bird Migration by Thomas Alerstam; Cambridge University Press; 1991; £55.

This extremely readable book is written by a leading figure in migration studies, who has pursued his research mainly in Sweden (he is a lecturer in animal ecology at the University of Lund), but nevertheless has wide experience in other regions, and whose name will be familiar to all serious well-read migration buffs.

The book was actually published in 1982 in Swedish, and it is to the credit of David Christie *(of British Birds)* that the translation is as faultless as it is; his command of the Swedish language is clearly superb, and there are only a few rather odd uses of words where he obviously could not find an exact English equivalent! Any text on bird migration generates superlatives, and this is no exception. Both the routine, but nevertheless amazing, feats performed by migrants, and the author's enthusiasm and love for his subject, are evident throughout, especially in the frequent marvellous personal anecdotes – to which all migration addicts could add their own.

Chapter 1 is more of a brief introduction than a chapter (3 pages), dealing with the history of man's perception of bird migration. The second chapter is an excellent and thorough 'grounding' in the earth's atmospheric processes and vegetation zones. Chapters 3 and 4 compries 80% of the book, and bring one the real 'meat'.

In Chapter 3, the author has grouped migrants according to ecological categories in a novel and, to my mind, a very successful way. Chapter sections describe birds in wetlands, birds which forage on lake and sea bottom, birds which feed on terrestrial plants, birds which feed on fish, birds which obtain food at the water's surface, birds of prey, insect-eaters, seed-eaters and omnivorours birds. This method is understandably somewhat artificial and arbitrary; insects include other invertebrates, and birds of prey consist of those feeding on terrestrial vertebrates only. However, Alerstam makes the reader aware of the drawbacks of this treatment, which are minor in the context of the book. Each of the groups is thus identified according to habitat and feeding behaviour, with their migration strategies related to these, and to breeding requirements, racial differences and migration routes. The author draws together all relevant information (including ringing recoveries and visual and radar observations), thus presenting a picture of the total migration, sometimes speculative, but always clearly reasoned.

This treatment has allowed him to compare unlike species which have similar life cycles, and like species which have different life cycles. For example, a comparison of sibling species such as chaffinch and brambling shows that their different feeding behaviour results in dissimilar migration strategies. He highlights questions still unanswered, and suggests research topics which may resolve them. Interesting points are raised. For example, why are migrant waders so abundant in Africa, while migrant ducks remain so scarce? He points out the curious fact that ruffs become solely seed-eaters in winter, and surmises that ecologicaly the wigeon is a small goose, while the Siberian jay is a large tit! There is also a fascinating description of dipper migration. In all, this chapter lists some 300 species of which about 11% are described in detail. The chapter ends with a concise summary of the evolution of migration, and its relationship with birds' lifestyles.

Incubating Purple Sandpiper in Iceland *Ron Summers*

Chapter 4 describes the migratory journey, with sections on the study of bird migration, flight speed, migration in flocks, soaring flight, flight altitude, fat as flight fuel, diurnal and nocturnal migration, weather and wind, and dangers during migration. It thus comprehensively covers all the problems a migrant encounters, and how they are overcome. The section on flight speed is a rather 'heavier' read, as it describes the physiological differences among species in relation to migration, and their power and energy requisites. It also includes impressive accounts of the calculation of migrants' speeds and efficiency by following them in aircraft. In the section on fat as flight fuel the author uses two vastly different migrant species, the turnstone and the red-billed quelea, as examples to illustrate the problem. He shows that the time of day during which migration takes place is linked closely to the migrants' food requirements whilst on passage, offering intriguing explanations for the differences between those mainly nocturnal or diurnal, those which move at both periods, and those that use soaring and gliding techniques. His account of the temporal rhythms of migration as viewed on radar is particularly enlightening. I am glad to see that in the section on weather and wind he emphasises the interdependence of the many weather factors upon each other, but rightly points out that, in the final analysis, it is wind and precipitation that are predominant in the modification of both routes and timing of migration. 'Dangers to migrants' covers a wide variety of problems which they meet, not least the well-known phenomenon of wind-drift. He ends the chapter with a thorough account of what must be the horror of horrors for small birds crossing the Mediterranean; the wall of Eleonora's falcons which awaits them at certain spots in autumn in order to feed their hungry chicks on what research has not only shown to be an enormous variety of species, but which has also thrown new light on the abundance of certain migrants crossing these regions.

Despite our ever-increasing knowledge, much more needs to be learned. How many more valuable facts could be gathered from further radar studies, especially in the less well-covered regions such as the Sahara and the Mediterranean, or even in northern Europe where such radar data could be combined with routine satellite and weather radar data? The potential is enormous, but no doubt costly.

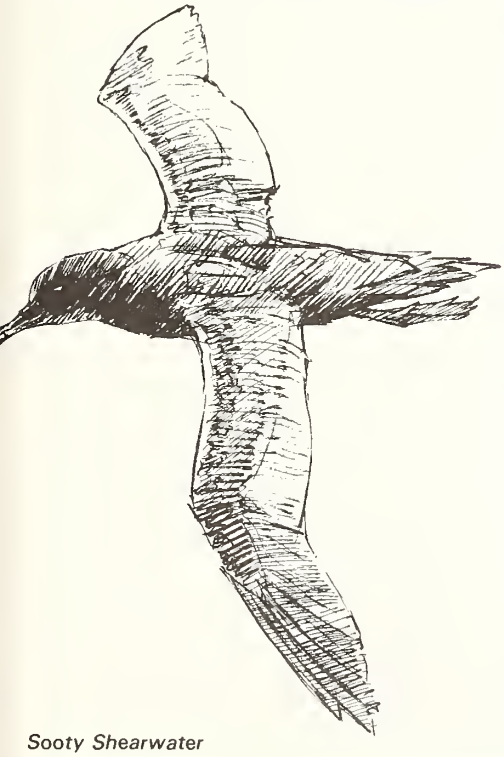
Chapter 5 discusses the sensory world of birds, and describes experiments to determine their capabilities, usually with the ubiquitous pigeon. Among others, polarised light, infrasound, smell, gravity and magnetism are all covered here, with a detailed account of the latter and the current controversy over the basis of such a sense. Both star and magnetic compasses in birds are discussed, and the coordination between them. He describes the problems which migrants appear to encounter near magnetic anomalies on the Earth's surface, and speculates that this may affect Pallas's warblers sufficiently to cause them to fly the wrong way and end up in NW Europe. In a similar context, he also draws attention to the even more intriguing fact that birds breeding near the magnetic North Pole are some of the world's greatest wanderers! Is there a link, he asks? The chapter ends with a discussion on the methods by which migrants find the correct route, the roles they play, and their significance. To me more than anything, this section highlights the extreme complexity of a migrant's navigation system, and how incredible these creatures really are.

Although the work is slanted towards migration studies of birds in Scandinavia, this does not detract from it in any way. One advantage of a new edition is that errors in the first can be corrected; I noticed none in this, and have few general criticisms. The original, very comprehensive, Swedish text has been updated in mostly minor aspects, both by author and translator. Understandably, the updates do not always extend to the figures (e.g. Nearctic knots staging in spring in Norway), and (according to BWP) fieldfares no longer breed in Greenland. Unfortunately, too, other more outstanding discoveries made in recent years, such as the genetic control of migration, are also missing. In Chapter 4 there is some confusion between cyclones and depressions, and tornadoes and hurricanes, perhaps due to a translation difficulty. Cyclone is an outdated term for a depression (mainly relating nowadays to certain tropical storms), and the mention of tornadoes should really refer to hurricanes.

The many maps and diagrams are clear and instructive, many of them based on ringing recoveries, and the whole text is refreshingly free of the myriads of references usually found in such a work, though this also makes it difficult to follow up individual points. I have always favoured a superscript system; it does not clutter the text, yet allows further consultation. The bibliography refers separately to each chapter section, leading to one work being cited no less than six times and another five times.

If ever there was a book I would like to have written, this is it! I cannot see how it can be bettered for a long time, and it provides a fitting, though perhaps not strictly comparable, successor to Moreau's *Palearctic-African Bird Migration Systems*, completed 20 years ago. How unfortunate it is that the high cost of £55 really puts it out of the reach of the ordinary birder or ringer, i.e. those who, over the years, have worked so hard to provide the answers to many of the questions discussed, Having said that, I have ordered my copy, and I suggest that it is obligatory reading for all serious migration watchers and ringers. It also makes one ponder on how many other equally fascinating foreign language books of this calibre are out there awaiting translation. Certainly, this is one which I am thankful to see in the English language, and wholeheartedly endorse the author's final sentence: *May the birds continue to fly over the earth, and may mankind wonder and investigate.*

Norman Elkins



Sooty Shearwater

Crofting and birds

In a joint letter, the RSPB and the Scottish Crofters' Union have warned Lord Strathclyde, Agriculture Minister for Scotland about the threats posed by changes to the European Community's Common Agricultural Policy.

The two organisations have identified four areas – Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and a number of the Inner Hebrides – as seriously at risk and have called for Environmentally Sensitive Area designations. This would enable the government to offer financial support to farmers and crofters who manage their land sensibly and in sustainable ways. "Some of Scotland's most endangered bird species would suffer if the changes proposed for the CAP led to either more intensive farming on croftlands or their abandonment altogether. ESA mechanism should be used to safeguard crofters' livelihoods and bird habitats alike." In view of the number of corncrakes recorded in Lewis and Harris this summer (see breeding round-up) and the shortage of birds in the Uists, it is surely time that something constructive was done to safeguard these and other endangered species.

Corncrake *RSPB*

Poisoned eagle

Two newspaper cuttings have been sent in by a member reporting the poisoning of a golden eagle on Dougarie Estate in Arran, owned by Mr S C Gibb, who is a member of the National Trust for Scotland's Council and Executive Committee.

The first, dated 20th April 1991, states that a golden eagle had been found dead, although curiously all those who would have been expected to know more were being tight lipped about the whole situation. The matter was reported to the RSPB, and officers from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries had taken the bird away for analyses. The results of these tests reportedly showed that the bird had been poisoned and it is understood that the police are now involved. Whether the eagle was intentionally poisoned or not is unknown.

The second cutting of 15th June 1991, reported a second golden eagle found, dead. However, there were apparently no suspicious circumstances about this death which was of a mature bird which could have died of natural causes.

There are only two known pairs of breeding golden eagles on Arran, and if these two are from each pair the consequences could be disastrous for the eagle population on the island.

Viking

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New look for the Isle of May

The 23rd of May was a perfect day in every way. The sun shone from a clear sky and, to the relief of several members of our party, hardly a breeze stirred when about 40 of us forgathered on the pier at Anstruther: staff and Board members from the NCCS, Northern Lighthouse Board, councillors, community councillors, staff from Fife Region, representatives from the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust, various societies, skippers, etc. The occasion was to celebrate the completion of phase one of the repairs and upgrading programme planned by the Nature Conservancy Council Scotland for the Isle of May, with conversion of the former Principal Lighthouse Keeper's house into modern accommodation for the wardening staff and research workers.

Press photographers duly turned up and took pictures, and we then went aboard the good ship MS 'Serenity' to make a most enjoyable trip out to the island and to help mark the occasion. The approach was as impressive as ever, with the cliffs alive and the sea seething with birds, and seals basking on the low rocks. As with any party visiting the May, we were welcomed ashore by the current NCCS summer warden and given a good introduction to the island and the birds, before we ascended to the 'Mousehouse'. This has most amazingly been turned into a small, but colourful display area. John Goodfellow, Vice Chairman South East Regional Council of the NCCS, opened the excellent and most informative display with a short speech, after which we made our way to Fluke Street, and the yard of the Lighthouse Keeper's House, where the day was marked by the presentation of a commemorative barometer and clock to John Goodfellow by James Aird of Crail, the builders who have been carrying out the repairs – on good days and bad.

John Goodfellow then thanked everyone concerned, the builders, the Isle of May research workers, the NCCS staff and especially Pete Kinnear whose hard work has led to the present occasion. He also had a special word for Jimmy Smith, Hon. Warden and Skipper of Breadwinner III, who has negotiated many a drenching wave to land his cargo of birdwatchers safely at the harbour on numerous occasions. The speech ended with some hopeful remarks about the future of nature conservation, and the importance of places such as the Isle of May.

A tasty and most welcome buffet miraculously appeared, and we all tucked in. There was just time for a quick scamper up to the top of the cliffs to see some of the true inhabitants of the island; the puffins, the guillemots, the razorbills, the shags, the fulmars, the kittiwakes, and then it was time to leave to get back to Anstruther before we were stranded by low tide.

Good luck, Isle of May. May your inhabitants flourish.

Anne-Marie Smout

Puffins may herald global doom

A £90,000 research grant awarded to well known scientist Dr Mike Harris will allow him to continue his research with puffins for the next 3 years, and could provide an insight into the mixed fortunes of the birds in Scotland.

Puffin *Wm S Paton*

After 20 years of study, the connection between puffins and global warming is not immediately obvious, and still relatively little is known about it. But somewhere along the line the puffins are just as likely to act as an early warning system for climate change, as they are an indicator of over-fishing around the Scottish coast.

The arctic birds are near the southern limit of their range and if their food source, mainly sandeels, moves then so must they, and changes in water temperature could make all the difference to their survival.

Seabirds in Orkney and Shetland have recently had disastrous breeding seasons, and some believe sandeel fishing (which has now stopped in Shetland) is to blame. However although there is no local sandeel fishery near the Isle of May breeding success dropped for the first time in 20 years.

In the 1960s there were just 20 pairs of puffins on the island; the population then increased and has now stabilised at 18,000 pairs. Mike also hopes to find out why the colony has stopped growing and why the lifespan of the birds, which can be as long as 30 years, has been decreasing since 1982. The work will also reveal how many chicks are returning to their natal colony to breed. Many of the birds are ringed and a significant number colour-ringed to allow individual identification without the need to recapture; this also identifies birds from the Isle of May colony. If the birds are a barometer for the marine environment, although Mike does not believe the pollution in the Forth has any significant effect on the puffins, then changes in adult mortality could be the first indication that something is wrong. "With global warming and climate change we need a long run of data before we can see what is happening, and it is only now that the long-term studies are becoming important".

Outside the breeding season the life of the puffin is still something of a mystery: despite the fact they hang around in the North Sea somewhere they are seldom seen.

The Isle of May has been a nature reserve since 1956 and has recently been purchased by the Nature Conservancy Council. Other breeding birds on the island include guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, shags, fulmars and eider ducks. It is also an excellent landfall for migratory birds that may have been caught up in adverse weather conditions over the North Sea.

Mar Lodge update

In our last isue, we reported on the projected sale of the Mar Lodge estate's 77,000 acres of important wildlife habitat. Among the many others entering the fray subsequently, the Prince of Wales reportedly persuaded John Kluge to agree to a "bargain" price of £10 million if interested conservation bodies could raise the money. Meanwhile, however, Kluge has turned down an offer, reputedly of this amount, by the Crown Estate Commissioners; the issue has been further complicated by his wish to retain 11,000 acres rent-free for shooting for 40 years.

Attempts to raise the money have been made by several voluntary environmental organisations, including World Wide Fund for Nature and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, who had hoped to persuade the Scottish Office to match their fund-raising efforts on a pound for pound basis. This proposal was, however, turned down by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton; the Government was not prepared to accept the risk. This major blow to conservationists' hopes seems at the time of writing to have vastly increased the chances of the estate passing into the hands of yet another millionaire; Kluge's predecessor was a Swiss millionaire, Gerard Panchaud. The attempt by conservationists to raise the money continues, however, as do their attempts to persuade the Government to change its mind.

As Drennan Watson, chairman of the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, of which the SOC is a member organisation, summed up in typically robust style; "If the government fails to intervene we will see some of the most important areas of our national heritage shoved back on the international market as a bauble for any one of the mega-rich playboys to pick up".

Flood control in Badenoch

Too often we see disputes arising in the field of conservation which have as their root the difficulty of reconciling the divergent interests of conservation and legitimate human activity; only too frequently any attempt to bring the two sides together have been undertaken too late. Such, one might hope, is not the case in Strathspey where an environmental study has now begun into plans to prevent flooding.

As a result of serious flooding in 1988-89 and 1989-90, Highland Regional Council commissioned a report which identified the confluence of the Feshie and Spey as a major problem area.

The NCCS is now following this up by funding an impartial study by the Institute of Hydrology to evaluate various proposals to alleviate the problem. The need for the NCCS to be involved is, of course, dictated by the environmental significance of the area; two SSSIs are likely to be affected by any flood-control work. Ornithological interest centres round the Insh Marshes, which as well as their birds contain valuable botanical material, while the Feshie SSSI is intended to protect a gravel river and delta in a virtually untouched state.

Many SOC members will know the Insh Marshes well, and we will all hope that the current study, due to be completed by October, will succeed in identifying a means of protecting the interests of the local population threatened by flooding while at the same time leaving this unique wetland to its birds and plants.

Reviews

***Lifetime Reproduction in Birds** edited by Ian Newton; Academic Press; 1989; 479pp; figures; £42.50 hardback; £19.50 paperback.*

Lifetime reproductive success (LRS) is a key concept in the study of population biology, life history strategy and evolutionary ecology. It provides a measure of individuals' biological fitness and allows the influence of genotype, phenotype and environment on this to be investigated. Many studies of LRS have been of birds, as individuals are relatively easily marked and monitored over long periods. This book, excellently edited by Ian Newton, brings together the results of 23 such long term studies ranging from a 7 year study of the green woodhoopoe in Kenya to the classic 40 year study of the short-tailed shearwater in the Bass Strait.

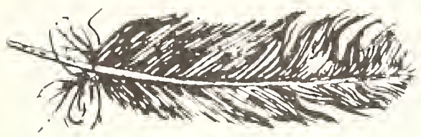
The introduction provides a very clear overview of the concept of LRS as a fitness measure and of the problems encountered in its accurate measurement. The main body of the book is divided into five parts encompassing studies of various distinct groupings of birds subject to rather different selection pressures; short-lived hole nesters, short-lived open nesters, co-operative breeders, birds of prey and long-lived species of waterfowl and seabirds. Each of these includes a short introductory section summarising some of the key conclusions emerging from the following studies.

The individual chapters include brief introductions to the species and particular studies, description of annual reproduction and survival rates and discussion of the observed pattern in LRS. Various contributory factors to observed variation in LRS, including mating systems, age at first breeding, habitat, population density and cohort effects, are discussed as applicable in various stuidies. The volume of work described is quite staggering and the insights to be gained from such long-term studies inspiring, a fact sadly neglected by funding agencies.

The overall conclusions to be drawn from these studies are well discussed in the final chapters of the book. Linda Partridge examines life history theory and Ian Newton rounds the book off with a lucid synthesis of the studies described. One fascinating general feature is the tremendous variation apparent for all species in individual LRS – typically between 60 and 90% of all fledglings never successfully reproduce and under 30% of breeders produce 50% of the next generation. Much more remains to be discovered about the influence of genotype and phenotypes on LRS.

This book contains a lot of very concentrated information which makes it rather heavier going than might be desirable for a bedtime read. However, it is an invaluable addition to the library of any ornithologist interested in the general insights which bird studies can provide into evolutionary ecology and the recently published paperback edition is exceptionally good value.

Kate Thompson



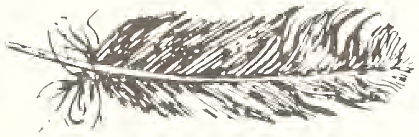
***Magpies** by T.R. Birkhead; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1991; 270 pp; 1 col. plate, many b&w photos, many tables & figs; £18.00.*

This book synthesizes what is known of the natural history of the black-billed magpie and the yellow-billed magpie. The latter breeds colonially and is confined to a small area of coastal California, while the former is familiar over much of the nothern hemisphere, including Britain. The North American race of the black-billed species is les strongly territorial than, and its general ecology somewhat different from, other races, and therefore is considered separately in the book. The European black-billed magpie is the best known form, mainly through study by Birkhead and others, and the text understandably reflects this bias.

Territorial, social and other behaviours are vividly described and interpreted in the first half of the book. Here is as fine a guide to understanding the behaviour of a wild bird as I can recall reading and from it the general birdwatcher will gain real insights into what local magpies are up to, especially in the breeding season. Four chapters on breeding biology follow. Here is meticulous reviewing, heavily bolstered with the fruits of Birkhead's (and colleagues') own scientific endeavours. A penultimate chapter explores some aspects of magpies' relations with humans. We are assured that they have no effect on songbird populations, despite the occasional and distressing attack on nestlings. A final chapter draws some conclusions comparing the three types of magpie. I found this chapter least rewarding – evolutionary and ecological comparisons suffer because American magpies are relatively poorly known.

If you want to know more about ceremonial gatherings by magpies, about a novel method of egg dumping, about how often (or seldom!) magpies copulate and a host (to great spotted cuckoos) of other things, you must read this book.

Jim Reid



***A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World** by Richard Howard and Alick Moore; 2nd edition; Academic Press, London, 1991; 622pp. hardback; £22.50.*

Howard and Moore's checklist remains the only single volume compilation of the world's birds which gives subspecies, and for each is given not only the main breeding areas but the main wintering areas. It is a complete revision of their first edition of 1980 which was published by Oxford University Press. An index of English bird names is included, and the authors have adopted a number of the "Suggested changes to the English names of some Western Palearctic Birds" proposed by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee in 1988 *(Ibis 130 Suppl; British Birds 81: 355-377)* but not as yet formally adopted by the Union. In the opinion of this reviewer they are in most cases eminently sensible.

The book is beautifully produced, as we have come to expect from Academic Press, and is remarkably good value.

William Harper

THE MAGPIES:
The Ecology and Behaviour of Black-Billed and Yellow-Billed Magpies
T.R. Birkhead

Tim Birkhead has studied both the Black-billed and the Yellow-billed magpie, in Europe and the United States and has produced a fascinating account of their ecology and behaviour.
Magpies covers all aspects of their lives, including their marital relationships, food hoarding behaviour, longevity and survival, nesting behaviour, breeding success and their controversial relationship with man.
Illustrated by David Quinn.

March 1991, 272 pages, £18.00, ISBN: 0.85661.067.4

BIRDS AND FORESTRY
Mark Avery and Roderick Leslie
foreword by David Bellamy

Recently the conflict between forestry and nature conservation has become a major environmental issue.
In this book an ornithologist and a forester have combined their skills to tackle the issues in a forthright manner.
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October 1990, 320 pages, maps, photographs and drawings, ISBN: 0.85661.058.5, £18.00

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The Ruff *by John G van Rhijn; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1991; 209 pp; £18.50.*

Ruffs have a fascinating breeding system. Females visit males on leks where courtship and copulation take place. There are three types of male, distinguishable by their behaviour and their plumage. 'Resident' males defend small territories on the lek. 'Satellite' males ingratiate themselves on to one or more territories whose 'Residents' show varying degrees of tolerance and aggression towards them. 'Marginal' males, to whom 'Residents' are extremely hostile, spend most of their time on the perimeter of the lek.

This book addresses this feature of ruff social life as well as other aspects of its biology. Following a brief introductory chapter there are four more considering the behaviour of males (a very long chapter amounting to half the book); aspects of female behaviour (only 10 pages long); a variety of life history issues (perplexingly entitled 'Indolence or Diligence') and phylogeny.

I expected a lot from the book but was mostly disappointed.

Specifically, the author too often mixes up causes and effects and makes too many assertions derived from too few data and/or mere speculation. My expectations of measured consideration of issues such as the relative importance of different male strategies and the possibility of sperm storage by females were perhaps unrealistically high.

More generally I think "The Ruff" is a book which doesn't quite know what it wants to be. Half of it draws largely on the author's own observations dating from 1964-1972, while the other half mainly summarises the findings of more recent studies. One half is very anecdotal in style while the other adopts a more formal approach. I suspect that the author's own extensive observations were conducted from an ethological background while the interesting questions nowadays belong to the realms of behavioural ecology. The result is an essay which attempts to steer a course between being a popular account and a scientific treatise. Personally, I found that it had neither the charm desirable of the former nor the rigour demanded of the latter. Nonetheless, any account of a bird with such remarkable breeding arrangements must contain some material of interest and this book is no exception.

Jim Reid

Red Grouse Populations and Moorland Management *edited by J.H. Lawton; British Ecological Society, Ecological Issues Booklet No. 2; 1990; 36pp; £*

This is one of a series of booklets being produced by the British Ecological Society which aim to provide informed, yet easily comprehensible, overviews for non-specialists of ecological topics of wider public interest due to their social, economic or political aspects. The stated objective is to provide an independent review of the relevant data, analyses of their possible interpretations and to suggest future research priorities.

This booklet arises from a workshop convened by the BES and RSPB in December 1989. A brief review of the natural history of the red grouse is followed by a description of three key features of red grouse population patterns; the general decline in the UK, the marked variations in population densities between moors and the commonly found cyclical fluctuations in numbers over periods of several years.

The overall decline in the grouse population is attributed both to loss and fragmentation of heather moorland habitat and to reduced densities on remaining moors, in part caused by overgrazing and decreased standards of burning practice. Less intensive control of foxes and crows is also cited as a contributory factor. Variations in density between sites are discussed in relation to moorland types, heather quality, predation, disease, parasites and the interaction of these factors with territorial behaviour. Two main hypotheses advanced to explain the population cycles in grouse are outlined. The Game Conservancy consider that a nematode parasite may drive the cycles with higher transmission rates during population increases causing subsequent declines. The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology's researchers favour a behavioural explanation related to alterations in territory sizes associated with changing population density.

A final section on management for grouse highlights the lack of attention given to harvesting policy and the need for sound moorland management. A series of simple recommendations are made on this.

This is generally a well written booklet which succeeds in giving a succinct overview of the topic. However, I was somewhat disappointed by the lack of any broader perspective on the conservation importance of heather moorland and the conflicts of interest which arise from this. The issue of persecution of raptors was largely avoided with only passing reference to its illegality. I would like to see professional bodies such as the BES working actively to bridge the gaps in understanding which so commonly occur between conservationists and land managers because the future for successful conservation in Britain must surely depend upon this being achieved. This booklet does not go as far as it might in that direction.

Kate Thompson

Rare Birds of the British Isles *by David Saunders; Patrick Stephens Ltd, 1991; 224 pp, 32 colour plates; £15.99.*

Several other works with similar-sounding titles give analyses of records of rarities or serve as guides to identification. Subtitled "A personal survey of over 300 unusual visitors" this book does both, although not at any great length, in a narrative manner which makes it enjoyable reading if taken in small doses. But there are far fewer than 300 ways of saying "X records, mainly in Y months with fewer/more in the past" and I found it became rather tedious. It is when there is a story behind a first record such as that concerning John Mitchell's research into the 1852 report of a ruby-crowned kinglet at Loch Lomond that I enjoyed this book, but the uncontroversial records become wearisome. Nevertheless, brief details of the first occurrence of every rarity, including many very old and very new records not yet accepted by the BOU, are brought together in an accessible format. Many of today's twitchers could probably say when and where the first eastern phoebe was noted, but what about rusty blackbird or snowfinch?

Two appendices, one tabulating whether each species has occurred in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, giving dates of first records and numbers of occurrences before and since 1958 plus a gazeteer to the many obscure places mentioned in the text are useful. The quality of the many recent colour photographs is very variable; long-range, fuzzy shots, even of rarities, fail to excite me, but others are magnificent. Why, however, does the cover show a superb gyr falcon inset against a background of a bluebell-carpeted wood? One colour and five black-and-white pages of field sketches make it easy to see how certain records got accepted and fill me with admiration for the artists' skill.

This book will, I'm sure, be bought for many rarity-conscious birdwatchers and is well worth a read, but I suspect that not many twitchers will buy it for themselves.

Peter Gordon

Temminck's Stint *A. Y. Kondratyev*

Gulf oil contamination

The extent to which the worst fears about wildlife mortality in the Gulf has been justified is not, as we go to press, entirely clear. What is apparent is that, once the more extreme doom-laden prophecies of monsoon failure leading to possible death by starvation of one billion people were proved exaggerated, media interest and thus public awareness began to wane.

As is perhaps inevitable, given the definitions of what is considered "newsworthy" by the media, the wide-spread concern which TV pictures of oil-soaked Socotra cormorants gave rise to was rapidly overtaken by the euphoria of military success. The problems remain, however, even if the journalists go away, and we cannot yet know, what, if any, long-term effects the Gulf War will have had on the migrant populations passing through the area – the red-necked phalaropes, the broad-billed sandpipers, the Terek sandpipers – even if the resident species have not suffered quite such a calamity as was at first thought. The fact that these birds nest well to the east of our own wader populations should not blind us to the fact that all are at risk from one form of pollution or another; it is merely that the Gulf has offered us a particularly dramatic picture. Roy Dennis, who visited the Gulf in an advisory capacity, hoped that the international attention focussed on the area would encourage Gulf states to take more care of their environment, which has been affected by oil spills for the last 20 years or more. Let us hope that they, and all other states, do learn a lesson from these events, but even in June, as we go to press, the "Independent" was reporting masses of birds dying in the lakes of oil surrounding the burning Kuwaiti oil wells. The technological ability to clear these death-traps was there, yet the will was apparently lacking. When will we ever learn?

Michael Murphy

SOC Notices

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are once again due on 1st October and members who do not normally pay by bankers order will find a renewal notice enclosed. Please note that the subscription rates are, once again, unchanged.

Annual Report, Winter Syllabus 1991/92 and Conference Booking Form

All these should be enclosed with this issue of SBN, if not please contact 21 Regent Terrace.

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1991 were: **April:** 1st £30 – D.S. Omand, Thurso; 2nd £20 – Mrs J. Denney, Glasgow; 3rd £10 – Miss J.M. Strachan, Ayr. **May:** 1st £50 – Miss W.E. Dickson, Alnwick; 2nd £30 – R. Warhurst, Manchester; 3rd £20 – M.J. Everett, Huntingdon; 4th £10 – C. McLellan, Motherwell. **June:** 1st £30 – B.A. Brown, Edinbugh; 2nd £20 – Mrs B. Lennox, Melrose; 3rd £10 – T.H. McGeorge, Edinburgh (formerly Dumfries).

During the summer we have paid for the repainting of the Waterston Library, and further work at Regent Terrace is planned. We still have room for new members so please join. More members mean more prizes and more for the SOC. For details write to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. Melrose 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

SOC Photo Competition

Entries for this year's photo competition should be sent direct to Don Smith who has kindly agreed to organise this year's competition. Entries should be with him no later than 28th October 1991. Don Smith, Scoretulloch, by Darvel, Ayrshrie KA17 0LR.

Thanks To

Rosemary Davidson, Betty & Bob Smith for so kindly giving up their time to come into the office and assist with packing the last issue of SBN.

At the time of writing the library was in the process of being redecorated thanks to the generosity of the 200 Club, without whose members projects like this would not be possible. Please therefore consider joining the 200 Club and support the hard work done by Daphne Peirse-Duncombe on behalf of the club.

Photos Wanted

Do you have any photographs including common/garden birds, habitats etc that would be suitable for possible use in SBN? Black & white are best. Then we would like to hear from you.

Recent Reports

Please accept our apologies for recent reports not being included in this issue, unfortunately they were not received in time for our printing deadline. However they will be published in the December issue of SBN.

Robert Robertson

It is with regret that we have to report the tragic death, as the result of a car accident, of Robert Robertson of Jedburgh. 'Rob' was an active member of the SOC, a keen ringer and Borders Rep for the BTO.

New Atlas

Fieldwork has been completed for the Atlas so many thanks to everyone who collected data. I am sure that in fifteen months' time you will be impressed by the end product.

As usual at this time but particularly this year I must ask everyone who has not already done so to submit all data for the project without delay. The sooner we get all Worksheets and Supplementary Record Forms the sooner final distribution, abundance and change maps can be produced. Please submit them either to your local Atlas Organiser or directly to me.

Thanks again.

Jim Reid

West Lothian Bird Club

The Inaugural Meeting of the above club will take place on 2nd October 1991 at the Almond Valley Heritage Centre. Des Dugan from the RSPB's Abernethy Forest reserve will be the guest speaker. An official invitation will be sent to the SOC nearer the date, but any interested members from Lothian would be welcome to attend.

SOC/RSPB Breeding Wader Survey 1992-93

Because of fears that land drainage and other changes in agriculture have affected wader populations in Scotland, the SOC and RSPB are planning a survey of the breeding waders of enclosed agricultural land, to be carried out in 1992 and 1993. The survey will repeat and extend the previous survey in 1982-83 organised on behalf of the SOC and Wader Study Group by Hector Galbraith and Bob Furness. We hope that SOC members will be willing to take part in the survey and especially to repeat the fieldwork on areas covered in 1982-83. Further details will be given in the December edition of Scottish Bird News when we will be asking for firm offers of help.

Allan Brown, Rhys Green and Ken Smith

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing, although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeatd on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to *Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Munlochy, Ross-shire IV8 8ND.*

Red Kites

As part of the NCC/RSPB re-introduction programme a further 20 red kites have been released in the Scottish highlands this summer. *Please notify RSPB Highland Office at Munlochy, Ross-shire immediately of any sightings by telephone if possible. Tel 0463 81 496/222.*

Small ads

FOR SALE – OLYMPUS OM10

Camera body £50. Contact K. Thompson, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT. Tel: 031-556 6042.

Sales Items

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SOC Fieldlist A pocket-sized checklist of all species regularly occurring in Scotland. New reduced price.	£ .50
SOC Checklist An annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. New reduced price.	£ 1.00

All prices include post and packing (except overseas – add £1.50) **SOC (Sales) 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).**

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£18.00

Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

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Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 31 December for the March number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

Unfortunately the hoped-for *1989 Scottish Bird Report* was not ready to include in this mailing, but is now with the printers. Any enquiries should be addressed to the Editor: **Alan Wood, 1 Rosebank Terrace, Kilmacolm PA13 4EW (tel 050587-3576).**

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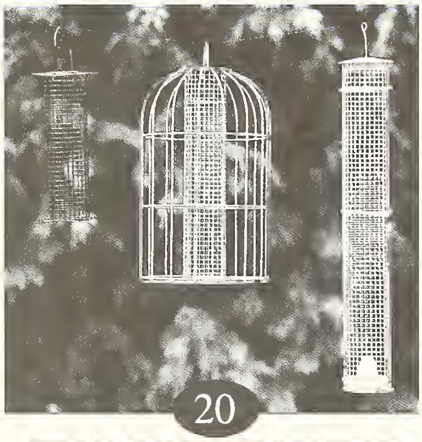

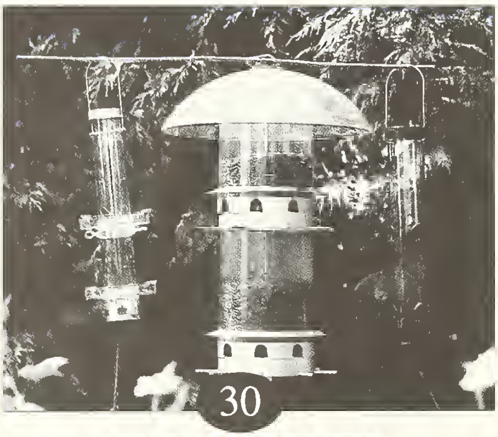

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THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1991 No. 24
ISSN 0268-8200

SMITHSONIAN
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Edited by Sylvia Laing,
Michael Murphy and
Kate Thompson

Barn Owl Conservation in Scotland

The barn owl is one of many species which could benefit from the various schemes introduced to cut back agricultural production. What then are the prospects of halting, or even reversing, the serious long term decline of barn owls in Scotland? Some of the more important issues are examined in this article.

Any conservation programme for a single species must contain a number of basic elements, but at least, must describe and bring into effect a set of environmental conditions under which a self-sustaining population can be maintained. Important points to be considered for barn owls include distribution and numbers, monitoring population changes and habitat requirements. The matter of re-introductions also needs to be examined.

Distribution and numbers

The limited information available suggests that barn owls have declined dramatically in some areas, but remain more numerous in others. The natural response is to try to conserve them where possible, but a more carefully thought out long term strategy will probably be more effective. Unless some definite targeting is done, it is quite conceivable that the species could become very rare everywhere. Initially, the best strategy would be to direct the maximum effort into consolidation in the remaining good areas. Then, at least there will be nuclei from which a future spread might be possible.

The best areas have long been known – all the main valley systems of the south from Ayr and Galloway across to Berwick. Other good areas seem to be around the Moray and Beauly Firths, Argyll and some of the islands, and around Loch Lomond and Flanders Moss. However, populations in even some of these areas seem not to be maintaining themselves at present, and an improvement in habitat quality is needed to bring them to a state where they produce a substantial surplus of young birds. Only then will their status be reasonably secure and a spread to other areas possible.

The alternative approach, to encourage conservation everywhere, regardless of the species abundance, carries a number of risks. If funds and labour are limited, a blanket approach could jeopardise success in the important core areas and hence, ultimately, everywhere. Efforts in areas where populations are now at very low density stand little chance of rapid success. The difficulty arises when expectations have been raised, as is the present situation in Britain, by the very high profile of some recent barn owl conservation publicity. Failure to achieve results quickly has resulted in many individuals resorting to captive breeding and release schemes, which, as discussed below, offer their own threats.

A quizzical barn owl *Brian Turner*

Barn owl conservation in Scotland needs a long term, well planned and co-ordinated strategy. Piecemeal schemes make inefficient use of resources and carry a high risk of failure. The strategy proposed here envisages a number of phases, spanning perhaps 30 or 40 years. The initial phase lasting, say 10 years, would involve a maximum diversion of resources into securing core areas. This would then be followed by attempts to encourage expansion from these areas.

Conservation interests outside core areas would be valuable in preparing the ground for future range extension and should not be discouraged, unless they advocated re-introductions or used up limited funding. Participants must realise the difficulties, not expect short term success and be prepared to accept that there may be some areas where re-establishment does not occur, even in the long term.

Population monitoring

All conservation projects should be monitored to check that objectives are being achieved. This should encompass numbers, but preferably also breeding success, mortality and aspects of habitat. This all adds to costs and monitoring should be reduced to the minimum needed. So, how often should numbers be assessed; every year, 5 years, or perhaps even 10 years? The answer depends on the amount of variation shown by the population and on this point barn owls could hardly be less helpful.

In the Scottish populations that have been examined, numbers are cyclic, showing as much as a five-fold natural variation in relation to vole numbers. There is, in effect, no such thing as present population size, merely a range, an upper and lower limit of numbers within which the population currently fluctuates. To present numbers as a single value is neither technically valid nor ecologically meaningful.

The objective of monitoring is to detect when numbers depart significantly from a pre-defined desired level. With barn owls, numbers would have to be assessed each year for about 6 or 7 consecutive years to establish, with any degree of validity, what the natural range was at any time, and a departure from this (unless exceedingly large) would not be detectable until a further 6 or 7 years assessment had passed. In other words, monitoring barn owl numbers is a completely worthless enterprise unless done more or less continuously every year.

Barn owls can be amazingly elusive animals and locating all pairs within an area can be an extremely difficult and laborious task. Tree and cliff nesters are especially troublesome. This means that any monitoring programme would have to be undertaken by experienced and dedicated individuals, rather than members of the general public.

For example, the results of a survey organised by the Hawk Trust in the early 1980s, which relied heavily on information from the public, gave a figure of 9 pairs as the population in the whole of Peebleshire. At that time, I was doing intensive fieldwork in an area encompassing just under a quarter of Peebleshire. Barn owl numbers in this area fluctuated between 9 and 15 pairs. Nearly all were in trees, and none of these were reported to the survey, so the total for Peebleshire may well have been of the order of 36 to 60 pairs, and certainly not 9 pairs.

After 14 years experience, our work in the southwest shows it takes about 30 days fieldwork between April and August to cover an area containing about 100 potential nest sites and on average, about 30-40 breeding pairs. The time commitment and dependence on experienced field workers is a major constraint in monitoring, even on a local scale. Nationally, it is obviously out of the question.

Habitat requirements

Two main aspects of habitat need to be considered; nest sites and foraging areas. In some regions, pesticides might also be relevant.

In the southwest, most barn owls nest in disused buildings as there are few suitable tree holes. In other areas, trees tend to be used more and on the west coast, cliff sites are quite common. During the 1980s suitable nest sites disappeared at a rate of about 4-6% per year, through the collapse of trees and buildings and renovations. About 40% of sites available in 1980 were gone by 1990, and extrapolating to the year 2000, only about 20% will be left. In 1991, nest site availability equalled the highest number of breeding pairs recorded during the previous decade. Henceforth, therefore, population size will become progressively limited by nest sites and all other conservation efforts will be pointless unless a substantial number of nest boxes is provided. Some parts of central Scotland are even worse off. In the Peebleshire study area, Dutch elm disease has now eliminated all 19 tree nest sites used between 1978 and 1985.

Technically, it is feasible to provide nest boxes and the only limiting factors are likely to be funding and labour. With a voluntary work force, costs will be about £20-£30 per pair of owls. Maintenance will be needed every 2-5 years, depending on the type of box and complete replacement will be needed after about 15-20 years. Obviously this is a substantial commitment.

In Scotland the most important foraging habitat is long grassland containing populations of field voles, common shrews and woodmice. For this reason barn owls can be found in a wide variety of areas, including lowland farm, hill margin land, forestry plantations and some military and industrial complexes. Our research in south Scotland, using radio transmitters to follow birds in farmland, was the first to establish the importance of grass edge habitats, particularly along woodland edges. Farmers are now advised to encourage such edge habitats, but if this type of habitat management is to work, a much more carefully thought out formula needs to be developed. The important point is that the habitat provided should be of high enough quality and quantity at least to support a completely self-sustaining population and preferably to produce a surplus of young birds to colonise new areas.

At some stage we have to think of individual pairs of owls, but it is completely inappropriate to think *only* in terms of individual pairs, as tends to happen at present. We must think of whole populations in which breeding performance at least matches mortality and succeeds in doing so over complete vole cycles. This means that many years of research are needed to quantify the whole system and to produce figures for the amount of habitat needed. Our work in south Scotland has now almost done this, but some questions still remain.

A computer model of barn owl populations in our low pastoral farmland areas has indicated that, in the long term, an average production of about 3.2 young per pair is needed to achieve stability. Breeding performance is related to the amount of grassy woodland edge within a 1 km radius of the nest site, the birds' normal summer range, and about 10 km length of edge is needed to achieve this required production. This might suggest that pockets of habitat like this, dotted around the countryside, would provide the answer, but there are complications. In the early 1980s, using dye marked birds, we discovered that in winter they frequently hunt up to 4-5 kms away from their nest sites. Do they simply wander further when there is no need to carry food to the nest, or do they actually need this amount of habitat in winter? If the latter, we would have to plan to have much bigger habitat units, inevitably involving many individual farms, and hence requiring co-operation amongst several farmers.

Barn owl in SW Scotland

Forestry Commission

Much could be done to improve productivity without waiting for habitat changes. At present there is no strict relationship between the locations of existing nest sites and good quality foraging habitat. Many suitable areas have no nest sites near at hand, so productivity of a local population could be increased just by the careful positioning of new nest boxes.

Many questions concerning habitat remain unanswered. How do hedgerow edges compare with woodland edges? Would a single large area of rank grassland be better than the same area arranged as strips? Are there differences between arable and pastoral areas? Despite these unknowns, however, we now have a good enough understanding of the birds' habitat requirements to provide workable advice.

Captive breeding and release schemes

During the last decade a craze for the captive breeding and release of barn owls has swept Britain. The number released apparently now runs into thousands each year, from hundreds of operators. No permission or licence is needed, there is no requirement to inform anyone. Within Scotland, there are reports of birds, brought in from the south of England, being released in Skye and a small number of southern birds were released into Dumfriesshire with the help of the Hawk Trust. However, the business really hit Scotland in 1991 in a blaze of publicity with 12 captive bred birds from northwest England being released into Perthshire with the assistance of the local FFWAG group.

A similar fad for captive breeding and releasing went through the USA about 5-10 years ahead of the British cases and was met with complete opposition from professional barn owl researchers. The practice has now almost died out, following a negligible success, but in the process millions of dollars of public money was dissipated that could have gone to any number of worthwhile projects.

What then are the cases for and against the release of captive birds? Only a brief résumé is possible here. The case for seems quite simple; operators see this as the only short term measure that might prevent local extinctions of barn owls. The case against can easily be portrayed as disinterested neglect, or idealism, but of course it is much more profound than this.

To put the matter into perspective, imagine what the response would be if we were to discover that someone had been raising Scots pine seedlings from 3 or 4 parents of unknown southern origin in a nursery in central England, and then planting them, without any checks on disease, all over the pinewood remnants of Mar Lodge Estate. There are obviously some very fundamental questions to be answered. If the release of barn owls is to go unquestioned, are we immediately to set about re-introducing other animals and plants to all parts of their range from which they are now absent, ignoring all thoughts of conserving local variation and adaptability?

The detailed arguments against are both scientific and non-scientific. In the barn owls' case, there is firstly a question of cruelty and futility, as released birds survive much less well than wild birds and the great majority die slowly of starvation. In a good vole year it is just possible that as many as 2 of the Perthshire birds might survive to breeding age, but if Perthshire is like most of the rest of Scotland, vole populations would have crashed this summer and it would be surprising if even one survives. More generally, there is little point using up valuable time and funds, with little chance of success, unless it can be demonstrated that all the reasons for the initial barn owl decline have been rectified and that the area is now capable of supporting a viable self-sustaining population.

Other arguments concern genetics, disease and better alternatives. A research project into the genetics of barn owl populations has just started, but at present we have little understanding of what is important. That alone should surely suggest caution. Individual captive breeding stocks usually consist of a small number of pairs, most often derived from sick or injured birds. Such birds frequently reach breeders indirectly. They may be picked up by members of the public and kept for a while in cages that held other diseased or injured birds. They may be housed with or alongside sick birds of other species.

It is obvious that the quarantine and hygiene arrangements in this whole business are inadequate. No credible health checks are carried out before release. No guarantees can be given that a significant disease will not be transferred to the wild population. Such might seem highly improbable, but who would have imagined that the Dutch elm disease would have devastated Britain's trees.

There is quite a high possibility that captive bred birds are relatively inbred in comparison with wild birds and that they do not derive from the 'better' genetic types in the population. In theory, it is possible that the release of such birds into a remnant wild population could do more harm than good, for example, by lowering breeding performance. The opposite extreme can also occur. There is a substantiated report of a Midlands breeder releasing birds derived from crosses between the British *alba* race and the Continental *guttata* race, and an as yet unconfirmed, but probable case of crosses between the British and African races being released. Such abuses are bound to occur when there is no legislative control, and again they could be damaging to a small wild population.

If it is argued that re-introduction will be successful at present, then there is no reason why it will not also be successful in 30 years' time. Barn owls from reasonably large populations have the natural ability to increase rapidly when given high quality habitat. So why not attempt to achieve a natural increase from secured core areas, by paying farmers to create suitable habitat, and if this has failed by 30 years' time, then, and only then, consider re-introductions? With adequate funding and appropriate scientific input, re-introductions could be better planned, better organised and more effectively executed than is possible at present.

Re-introductions of barn owls are sometimes justified by comparison with sea eagle and red kite introductions. However, comparison is invalid, as in both these cases the indigenous populations in the whole of Scotland had become extinct, with no prospect of natural recolonisation.

Conclusion

The most important immediate threat to barn owl populations in Scotland is the loss of nest sites, but with reasonable funds and a voluntary work force, this could be rectified. We also know enough about foraging habitat requirements to plan habitat management for barn owls. It is argued that efforts should be initially concentrated into securing populations in core areas. Captive breeding and release schemes should be strongly discouraged, as these could damage, rather than help, remnant wild populations.

Iain Taylor

"State of the Scottish Environment"

A report by Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link bearing the above title should be appearing in print at about the same time as this issue of SBN. It will be a valuable overview and commentary, wide-ranging in its subject matter, all of which is significant for all those concerned with environmental matters. As a member of Link, the SOC has been represented at meetings to discuss the document and has been consulted and offered opinions throughout.

Sand Martin decline in 1991

Tom Dougall, who regularly rings a sand martin colony in the Borders (SBN 20) has written in response to the note in the 1991 Breeding Season Roundup on the reduction of hirundine numbers. At his colony both the numbers of occupied nests and the numbers of birds ringed were down by 75% with only 40 adults present in 1991 compared to 157 in the previous year. However, breeding success was apparently similar in both years with 33% of birds caught being juveniles.

First breeding record

Following last year's widespread crossbill irruption, it is perhaps not surprising, although gratifying, that a brood of four young parrot crossbills was successfully raised at Loch Garten this year. Although a pair did breed in Norfolk in the 1980s, this is the first breeding record from North of the border.

SOC/RSPB Breeding wader Survey 1992-93

As announced in the last edition of Scottish Bird News, the SOC and RSPB are planning a major survey of waders breeding on enclosed agricultural land, to be carried out in 1992 and 1993. This will repeat and extend the last survey in 1982-83 organised on behalf of the SOC by Bob Furness and Hector Galbraith. Elsewhere in the UK the distribution of breeding waders has become very restricted and is largely limited to areas in conservation management. In Scotland breeding waders are still thought to be widely distributed and we need to know about the important sites before they too go the way of their English and Welsh counterparts.

The objectives of the survey are threefold:

(1) To identify and survey the key sites in Scotland holding large numbers of breeding waders.

(2) To repeat the survey of as many of the sites first covered in 1982-83 as possible.

(3) By means of surveys of randomly selected grid squares produce overall population estimates of waders breeding in Scotland.

A reflective snipe *Arthur Gilpin*

It is clear that meeting these three objectives will be a major task for which we will need as much help as possible. The survey will involve both volunteers and paid teams, with paid fieldworkers covering some of the more remote areas and concentrating on the surveys of randomly selected grid squares.

We have appointed Mark O'Brien as the survey organiser who will be based in Regent Terrace. He comes with considerable experience of breeding waders, having organised a joint BTO/RSPB survey in 1989 and subsequently working on breeding wader numbers and the management of their habitats for the RSPB.

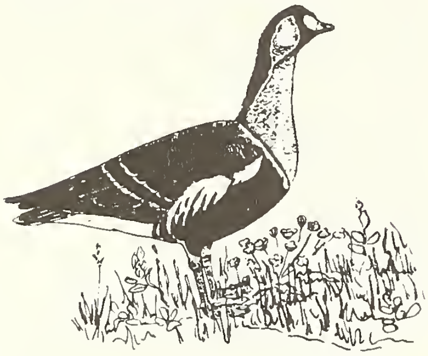
Over the next few months Mark will be working with SOC members and RSPB staff to identify a list of key sites to be surveyed. He will then work out the best way to integrate the efforts of the volunteer surveyers and the paid teams in each area. The survey methods will be similar to those used in 1982-83 except that we are planning to provide observers with maps of their sites. Details of the methods, recording cards and site maps will go out to fieldworkers in February/March in good time for the breeding season.

If you would like to help with the survey. or know of a key site that should be covered, please contact Mark as soon as possible. We are particularly keen that those of you who surveyed sites in 1982-83 cover the same ones again this time.

Allan Brown, Rhys Green and Ken Smith

Caerlaverock

"Where is it then?"
"Where is what?"
"Where's the Red-breasted goose!"



Red-breasted goose *Carol Ogilvie*

Since the Baikal Teal of 1973, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's (WWT) Centre at Caerlaverock has turned up its fair share of rarities. European cranes, American wigeons, a great white egret, a spoonbill, long-billed dowitchers, this autumn's Wilson's phalarope and, of course, the Red-breast; each has produced its own influx of excited birders; people like you and me, toting 'scopes or at least binoculars; and each has drawn attention away from the Centre's most exciting story.

For these lost birds are by no means the most important to visit the Centre; any more than the birders, lost or otherwise, are the most important people.

In 1928, Peter Scott visited the area for the first time, on holiday from University. He later wrote, "It was the beginning of my love affair with a stretch of Scottish coastline between the River Nith and the Lochar Water, which includes the ruined castle of Caerlaverock (the Castle of the Lark) .... The huge expanses of sand and the lawn-like 'merses', covered by the high spring tides, are the wintering grounds of barnacle geese ....."

Years later, he was to put the beauty of Caerlaverock and its birds to work for the cause to which he devoted the greater part of his life. For Peter Scott believed that nature conservation will only be achieved in an increasingly crowded world by winning over the hearts and minds of people.

Two populations of barnacle geese winter in Scotland. Those that breed in Greenland return to the Western Isles and to Ireland, while those from Spitsbergen flee from the arctic winter to the relative clemency of the Solway Firth, spending most of their time there at Caerlaverock.

Since 1957, Caerlaverock has been the site of one of Britain's earliest National Nature Reserves (NNR) and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland's (NCCS) achievements there are well known: not only did they allow the Spitsbergen barnacles to begin their recovery from the dangerously low number (less than 400 birds) that they had reached in the late 1940s, but they have also pioneered the integration of wildfowl conservation with the potentially conflicting interests of wildfowling and agriculture.

The WWT holding, established in 1970, includes 600 acres of merse (saltmarsh) within the NNR sanctuary area and has augmented it with a further 750 acres of merse and grassland. This partnership between the Trust and NCCS has enabled the geese to recover their numbers to pre-war levels: to recover, perhaps, completely. For, at 12,000 birds, the population is probably as big as it has ever been since the first vagrant Barnacles reached Spitsbergen's isolated archipelago, maybe some 200 years ago.

In addition, however, the Trust has constructed a complex system of screened approaches linking a series of observation towers and hides which overlook large areas of the merses and the fields. For Peter Scott's philosophy, born of a wish to share what he found beautiful with other people, requires that the spectacularly successful conservation of the geese be put to good use on behalf of less fortunate animals and their habitats elsewhere.

In partnership this time with the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Trust has made it possible for thousands of people every year to enjoy spectacular views of the geese, to get astonishingly close to other wild birds such as wigeon and whooper and Bewick's swans, and to share in the breath-taking beauty of Caerlaverock, with the misty blues of the Lake District mountains to the south, and to the west, the looming backdrop of Criffel.

Central heating, special facilities for children, the elderly and the disabled, and an Education Service with fully qualified staff, and programmes designed to meet the needs of teachers in these days of the National Curriculum; everything is designed to ensure accessibility to all. Many visitors, of course, are already enthusiasts; people like you and me, needing no convincing that the natural world is something worth preserving. But the really important ones are the ones that remain to be convinced; the ones that may not even bring binoculars. It's to these that the barnacles must play the role of evangelist, of ambassador, for a wider cause that has come uncomfortably close to being lost.

The number of people visiting the Centre in winter is rising by as much as 25% each year. But the Trust's remit now extends beyond birds to the whole of the wetland ecosystem, and, in a new initiative for 1992, the Centre is to remain open throughout the summer, when traditionally it has been closed to allow the management of the farm land to take place while the geese are away. Now visitors will be able to access parts of the Refuge which are visible in winter only from the hides. Ragged robin, northern marsh orchids and yellow rattle line what will be a delightful summer walk, and the emphasis will shift away from birds towards frogs, natterjack toads, dragonflies, and great diving beetles. With luck, even the Centre's otters will have a role to play!

If the barnacle population is now limited by the availability of resources on the breeding grounds, as now looks likely, could not the work of the Trust at Caerlaverock be thought complete? Theory suggests that a population of wildfowl is fully viable at 100,000 individuals; that at this level and above, the natural fluctuations in numbers that occur over the years do not threaten its overall survival. Limited by their own ecology to only 12% of a "viable" population, therefore, the Spitsbergen barnacles will continue to need looking after.

But the real challenge that lies ahead is to provide adequate facilities for the increasing numbers of human visitors – clearly not limited, by their ecology or anything else! – and to do so in a way that does not detract from the essential, we hope the influential, beauty of the place.

Since the Centre loses tens of thousands of pounds a year on its operation, the developments that we hope to see will not be easy to finance. Nevertheless, with much achieved already, and with each visitor contributing, as they do, to making the experience that they have enjoyed possible for their successors, we believe that the future is bright. If you have never seen that "stretch of Scottish coastline between the River Nith and the Lochar Water", make sure that this winter you do. If you're lucky, you may even see the Red-breasted goose!

John Doherty, Curator,
The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Caerlaverock

Barnacles grazing at Caerlaverock ***Bobby Smith***

Recent reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to ***Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,*** *at the end of March, June, September and December. The period July to September is covered here.*

Up to 2 immature **White-billed Divers** were present along Lothian coastline between Gosford and Gullane Bays from 31st July – 15th September. In Gosford Bay the **Red-necked Grebes** peaked at 52 on 25th August. A **Black-browed Albatross**, perhaps the Hermaness bird was off the mouth of Loch Grosebay, Harris on 5th July. In August and September **Cory's Shearwaters** were reported from Barra, Girdle Ness, Barn's Ness and North Ronaldsay, whilst **Great Shearwaters** were reported from Barra and South Uist. The recent ''splitting'' of **Mediterranean Shearwater** from **Manx Shearwater** may well lead to an upsurge in Scottish records though this autumn only 4 were reported from Orkney, Lothian and Aberdeen along with 2 **Little Shearwaters** off North Ronaldsay and Wick. North-westerly gales in mid September produced 3 large counts of **Leach's Petrels**: 67 of Uisaed Point, Kintyre, 54 off Troon and 40 of Rubha Ardvule, South Uist respectively. A **Little Egret** at Loch Craignish, Argyll may well be the same bird responsible for sightings in the area for around 3 years whilst at least 2 **Black Storks** were in north Scotland in late July: singles briefly near Inverness then on the Black Isle, then two together on Lewis (though sadly 1 later was found dead). The last week of September produced three **Snow Geese** records; singles at Hule Moss, Berwickshire and Strathbeg and an intriguing record of a flock of 11 in the inner Forth at Skinflats and Torry Bay.

A pair of **Garganey** were present at Loch Gelly (2nd-3rd August) whilst a **Blue-winged Teal** was on St. Kilda in mid September. **Red-crested Pochard** at Vane Farm in August with further September records at Barr Loch, Renfrewshire, Baron's Haugh, Lanarkshire and WWT Caerlaverock, Dumfries-shire. The moulting **Scoter** flock at Murcar, Aberdeen held at least 6 **Surf Scoters**. In July two migrant **Honey Buzzards** were seen in Ayrshire and East Lothian, with a further bird in south Ayrshire in August and September records from Carsethorn, Kirkcudbrightshire and Galashiels. About 15 **Marsh Harriers** were reported in the period with Strathbeg and Montrose Basin having birds almost daily throughout. A male **Red-footed Falcon** was reported in Strathglass near Inverness on 31st August. 4 **Hobbys** were reported at Montrose Basin, Lochar Water, Dumfries-shire and on Unst. A **Gyrfalcon** was seen in the Outer Isles during June and July. One of the birds of the period was a **Baillon's Crake** on Fair Isle from 28th September only the 3rd Scottish record this century. Perhaps **the** bird of the period was the 1st summer **Sandhill Crane** in south Mainland Shetland from 17th-27th September, only the 3rd ever in Britain and Ireland though the second to be seen in Scotland.

Only the 3rd ever Scottish record of **Greater Sand Plover** was at Donmouth, Aberdeen on 18th-19th August. A **Pacific Golden Plover** was on North Ronaldsay from 14th July with an **American Golden Plover** on Fair Isle on 15th August. A **Baird's Sandpiper** was on Fair Isle from 5th-16th September with 2 together at Bragar on Lewis on 26th September mirroring a record in Aberdeenshire last year. 7 **Pectoral Sandpipers** were reported during August and September with only 1 **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** reported on Fair Isle from 26th-28th September. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Loch of Tankerness on 15th September was a first record for Orkney with a **Spotted Sandpiper** at Balgray Reservoir from 28th September being the first record for Renfrewshire with another one being recorded at Lerwick, Shetland from 22nd-26th September. At least 1 **Wilson's Phalarope** was on the Eden Estuary, Fife from 23rd-24th September with migrant **Red-necked Phalaropes** recorded at Hule Moss, Berwickshire in July and in September two together on the Ythan Estuary and one at Hound Point, West Lothian. In September 24 **Grey Phalaropes** were reported mainly from the Western Isles.

A highlight of the autumn was the unprecedented skua passage with an amazing total estimate of 1090 Long-tailed and 294 Pomarines.

Of the 5 **Mediterranean Gulls** reported all were in the Forth apart from 1 at Macduff. 6 **Sabine's Gulls** were reported in August and September. 15 **Black Terns** were reported mostly from east coast headlands whilst an adult summer **White-winged Black Tern** was at Annachie Lagoon, Aberdeenshire from 14th-22nd July. North Ronaldsay has probably had its best ever autumn in terms of rare and scarce birds though frustratingly perhaps their rarest bird, a **Yellow-Billed Cuckoo** was found dead on 25th September. Single **Bee-eaters** in July on Stronsay and at Strthbeg were eclipsed by a party of 7 flying over Lochar Water, Dumfries-shire on 12th August. The only **Hoopoe** was in a Dumfries garden on 2nd August whilst only 4 **Wrynecks** were reported all in Orkney and Shetland. 3 **Short-toed Larks** were recorded from 20th September all in Shetland with 2 **Richard's Pipits** reported in late September at Girdle Ness on 27th and on Fair Isle on 30th. During September at least 6 **Pechora Pipits** were recorded in an amazing influx with at least 3 on Fair Isle, 1 on Unst and 2 on the Shetland Mainland. A **Red-throated Pipit** was on Fair Isle from 22nd-28th September.

A female **Desert Wheatear** was near Port Henderson, Ross-shire on 26th September with an elusive **White's Thrush**, frustrating many and delighting some, present at Brora, Sutherland from 27th-29th September. Not surprisingly the only **Lanceolated Warbler** was on Fair Isle from 28th – 30th September. **Great Reed Warbler** on Unst on 27th September, 29 **Barred Warblers** including 1 at Leswalt, Wigtownshire, 4 **Greenish Warblers** in Shetland and Aberdeenshire, 4 **Arctic Warblers** all in Orkney and Shetland and 22 **Yellow-browed Warblers** all in the northern isles apart from 1 in Fife, reported. 10 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were reported in September all from typical areas. Single **Red-backed Shrikes** were on Fair Isle and in Orkney in late September whilst single **Rose-coloured Starlings** were at Wick, on South Uist and on Isle of May. 21 **Common Rosefinches** were reported whilst Scotland's third **Blackpoll Warbler** was on Fair Isle on 30th September. An **Ortolan Bunting** was at North Berwick on 30th September, **Little Buntings** on Fair Isle and Fetlar, 4 **Yellow-breasted Buntings** on Fair Isle with 1 on Fetlar and a **Black-headed Bunting** at Sumburgh, Shetland from 26th August.

Angus Murray

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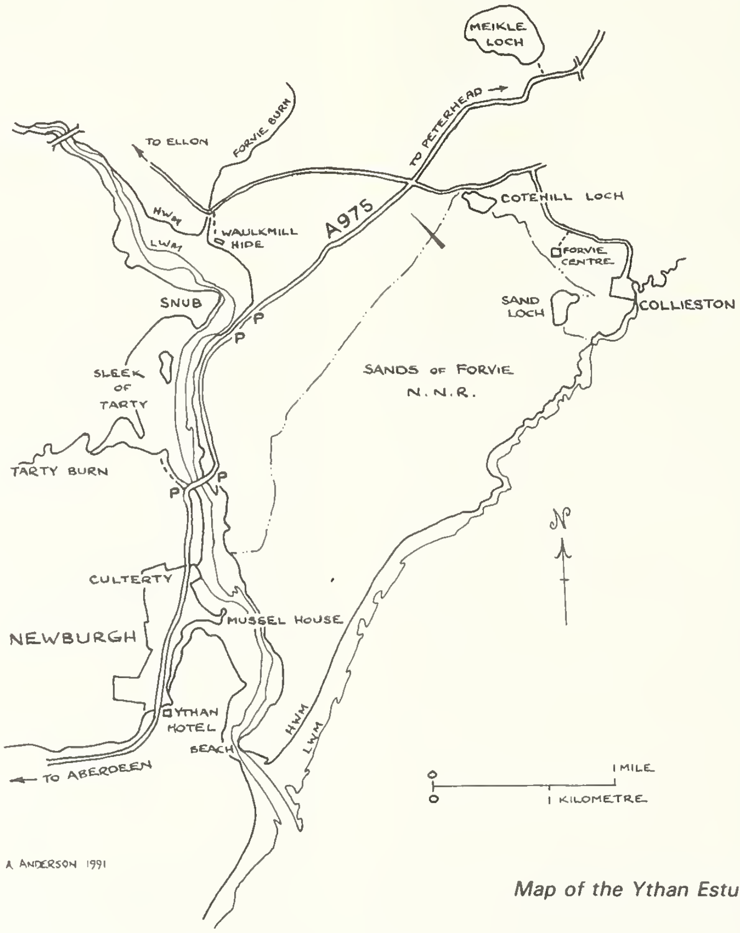
Birdwatching around the Ythan Estuary, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire

Viewed from a bus or car on the way to Newburgh, this part of north-east Scotland may not be altogether favourable. The almost treeless, windswept farmland of the Buchan plain, however, hides its pleasant surprise until the last minute, down by the coast.

The estuary of the River Ythan and its immediate surroundings has long been a Mecca for the birdwatcher, and with good reason. In a day, one may become acquainted with terns breeding on sand dunes, eiders diving on mussel beds, waders on mudflats and wildfowl on nearby lochs. A fifteen minute car ride from here takes one to the compact sea-bird cliff at Bullers of Buchan just north of Cruden Bay, but Newburgh has its own bird-cliffs as part of Sands of Forvie National Nature Reserve. The changing seasons present their varied bird-life interests throughout the year, from breeders through passage migrants to winter visitors in large numbers.

The bird-life of the Ythan Estuary has not changed greatly since George Dunnet wrote on the subject in Scottish Birds in 1963. The village of Newburgh, however, has grown considerably since then, in response to the '70's oil boom. Main Street looks much as it did a hundred years ago but the influx of a commuting population has inevitably brought additional pressures to bear on the finite resources of this much-sought-after piece of countryside. The colourful sails of surf-boards are now seen regularly on the middle reaches of the estuary. Fishermen and sport shooters need their space as do dog-walkers, birdwatchers and others. After an initial outcry about who can do what and where, we seem to have resolved these problems with some advantages for the birdwatcher. These include improved parking, access and facilities at Forvie Reserve and a large, comfortable hide with wheel-chair access at Waulkmill, overlooking the mudflats on the upper reaches. The NCC Forvie Centre near Collieston, with its wild-life pond and display of wild flowers, is well-worth a visit and the Walkmill hide has a bird-log in which visitors volunteer up-to-date information on local sightings.

Newburgh is only thirteen miles north of Aberdeen; two miles after the turn-off on the A92 at the "Little Chef" restaurant. There is a regular bus-service from the city and accommodation is available throughout the year at the two village hotels. The Ythan Hotel also maintains a camping and caravan site and there are a few "bed-and-breakfasts" in the village.



Map of the Ythan Estuary area

The Coast and river mouth

The Ythan estuary is tidal for just over four miles so tide tables are essential. Waders, for example, may feed in surrounding fields during high water or become invisible on the inaccessible Inch Geck Island; a favoured roosting place at this time for cormorants also. That the estuary is only 700 yards across at its widest, however, is an advantage to the birdwatcher. It is worth remembering that there is a time lag of one hour for high water at Sleek of Tarty.

The visitor arriving from the south should call first at Newburgh beach (turn right at Ythan Hotel). From a high sand-dune the view can be exquisite, embracing the mainly heather-clad Sands of Forvie N.N.R. lying between the estuary and the North Sea. Its coastal fringe of sandy beach merges after a couple of miles with the seabird cliffs of the north-east coastline. Just across the estuary mouth is a vast sand-dune (reputedly one of the largest in Europe) around which is the breeding place of four species of terns; Sandwich, common, arctic and little, numerically in that descending order with over 1,000 successful breeding pairs of Sandwich terns. The little tern is often least successful because of its habit of nesting toward the highwater mark where it is prone to disturbance by walkers and anglers. The tern breeding season is from April to July and they must not be disturbed by visitors then. When shoals of herring fry and sand-eels enter the estuary on the flow, the clamour that erupts among diving terns of all four species is a memorable sight and it can be closely watched from the south shore. July draws skuas, mainly arctic, to the river-mouth to harry the terns. Pomarines may be seen from time to time and, rarely, the long-tailed skua.

It is at Newburgh Beach when the tide is low that the eiders are most easily watched while they feed on submerged mussel beds. Some 6,000 birds have been recorded in the estuary. Large numbers nest on the Forvie Moor. The offspring are brought in large creches to feed on snails, shrimps and other invertebrates on the mud-flats further upstream, protected from gulls by "aunts" and parents. During the past few years the estuary has been visited both in winter and summer by single male king eiders (two last year!) in breeding plumage. They draw admiring humans from all over Britain and it is not unusual, as a local, to be stopped and asked "where is the king" by a bus-load of birders. Although it may be seen at any mussel bed between the river mouth and Newburgh Bridge, a little time spent sitting at the ruined Mussel House at the end of Inches Road could pay off.

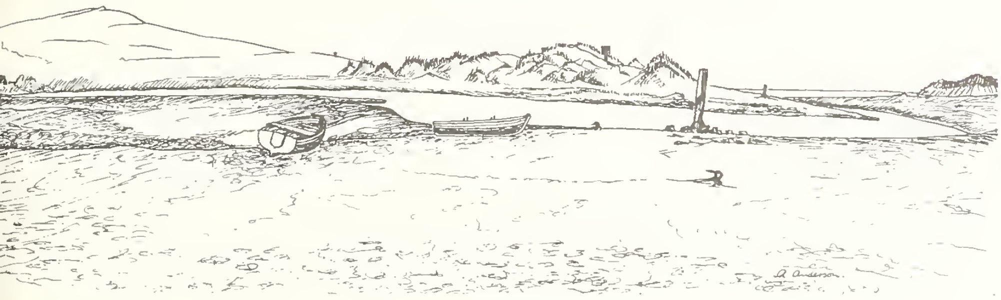
The river-mouth in winter has plenty to offer by way of other duck species such as scaup, long-tailed duck and red-breasted merganser. Common and velvet scoter have been seen in recent years and the odd guillemot and razorbill seeks shelter from offshore. Among the sand-dunes nearby, flocks of up to 200 snow buntings forage in winter.

The middle reaches

Extensive mussel beds in the middle reaches of the estuary play host, not only to a large proportion of the eider population, but also to many oystercatchers and turnstones. To see waders in large numbers we must press on to the mudflats of Tarty Burn and the Sleek. On the left as we leave the village is Aberdeen University's Culterty Field Station, internationally renowned in the field of animal ecology. A brief stop to talk to one of its ornithologists, if available (the research that goes on here is in invertebrate as well as vertebrate ecology), would prove interesting, as would a walk around the six acres of woods and ponds there. At Newburgh Bridge, one walks the few hundred yards north from the car park to the Tarty Burn. Here the Tarty enters the Ythan and the great mudflat of the Sleek opens up. Some years ago a pair of spoonbills dabbled here for several days. The Sleek with its masses of birds is too extensive to cover by binoculars or even telescope from this angle and it is best to proceed west a few yards, to the small mudflat at the bend of the Tarty Burn, carefully avoiding disturbance to the birds. Curlews, ringed plovers, bar-tailed godwits (black-tailed were reported recently) knot, golden and grey plover, greenshank and snipe have been seen at close quarters here, depending on season. Pools in nearby fields may produce spotted redshank and ruff.

A rough guide to the seasonal presence of some common waders on the Ythan gives peak numbers of curlew in July, redshank and oystercatcher in August, golden plover and knot in September, lapwing in November and dunlin in January. Many of those species may be present in varying numbers throughout the year and, interestingly, most have shown an increase in recent years.

On the way to the hide at Waulkmill, pull into one of the two little car-parks across from the Snub. The southern one gives a good view of north Sleek where shelduck fight over territories; this is an important feeding area where adults bring their ducklings from nests as distant as Forvie Moor. On the river, at high tide, a few cormorants, goldeneye and some hundreds of wigeon may be seen although the latter have declined in numbers recently. Mute swans favour this section also, and a sweep with binoculars around the field could reveal a flock of whooper swans. Waulkmill hide is well-maintained thanks to the N.C.C. Warden, Bob Davis, and his helpers. From it, if you have timed the tide properly, the mudflat will have a good assortment of waders, including godwits, curlew and whimbrel. Up to 100 curlew sandpipers have been seen here. Flocks of greylag and pinkfoot sometimes seek refuge on the river or feed in the fields across from the hide. Gulls of several species, sometimes thousands, also use this area as a pre-roost gathering site.



The beach at Newburgh *Sandy Anderson*

The lochs

Meikle Loch and Cotehill Loch are just over a mile from the Waulkmill hide. Ruddy duck are frequently present at both. Cotehill is more easily observed from the road and has a fair reputation for the odd rarity, such as Wilson's phalarope in 1984. It also maintains a number of coots, moorhens and dabbling ducks. Meikle Loch must not be missed. I tend to take my visitors there just before sunset when the geese fly into roost; tens of thousands of pinkfeet can appear in the area in early autumn and thousands of greylag in spring. In good light, the odd snow goose, white-front, barnacle or brent may be picked out. Whilst waiting for the grand show, there are usually plenty of shoveller, teal, goldeneye and other ducks to watch. The approach to Meikle Loch is by a short, rough track on the left off the A975.

If you wish to explore the Sands of Forvie N.N.R. fully as well as the Ythan estuary, I suggest that you get a very early start! It is a place of great historical and biological interest and is worthy of a day visit itself. I do recommend a walk (one mile) downstream from its car-park at Newburgh Bridge. Moorland birds such as wheatear and meadow pipit are in the heathland and the occasional short-eared owl is recorded. In its 32-year history Forvie has been shown to be of outstanding importance for birds, listing 225 species of which 43 are regular breeders. The walk, if continued as far as the tern colony, can be rewarding, with views from a hide at appropriate times.

Finally, may I point out that, for birdwatching on the Ythan, ''welly-boots'' or even a motorcar are not essentials but O.S. maps, Landranger Series sheets 30 and 38, are helpful. Leaflets on Sands of Forvie N.N.R. may be had from Bob Davis, Little Collieston Croft, Collieston, by Ellon.

Sandy Anderson

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Although the majority of the world's herons live in the tropics, Europe is home to nine species. Highly specialised birds, they exhibit many interesting differences in their behaviour and ecology and are a favourite group for many ornithologists. Coverage includes general descriptions of the family, field characters, distribution, population size, breeding and feeding ecology and behaviour.

October 1991, 320 pages,
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November 1991, 488 pages, £20.00
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Reviews

***The Birds of Japan** by Mark A Brazil, illustrated by Masayuki Yabuuchi, Christopher Helm, London 1991; 466pp; £35.00, ISBN 0 7136 8006 7.*

In 1890 Henry Seebohm published his "Birds of the Japanese Empire" without ever setting foot in Japan. Mark Brazil on the other hand spent many years in the country, not only looking at its birds but also immersing himself in Japanese language and culture. The results are everywhere to see in this superb volume which, drawing on Japanese as well as English-language sources, represents the definitive study of Japanese birds in any language. In format it is reminiscent of Valerie Thom's "Birds in Scotland" (1986), providing a geographical and historical overview before describing the status and distribution of the 583 species presently on the Japanese list. Unlike "Birds in Scotland", Brazil also summarises breeding biology and is particularly good on the sub-speciation which is such a feature of the Japanese archipelago. Occasionally, as with the recently-discovered Okinawa Rail (1981), he will provide information on behaviour too. Naturally, some accidentals only warrant a few lines, whereas specialities like the Japanese Crane, Steller's Sea Eagle or Blakiston's Fish Owl are dealt with quite extensively. Unlike the 537 species listed in "A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan" the entries are sensibly listed in Voous order and the generously proportioned distribution maps are gathered together at the back. The colour plates, and more especially the line drawings of Masayuki Yabuuchi are a particularly impressive feature of the book.

According to Brazil, Japan now sees far fewer Western birders than previously, despite the astonishing diversity of its avifauna. This book may well rectify that. It is not one for the field, but no visitor to Japan can afford to ignore this work of immense scholarship which is a pleasure both to handle and to read.

Andrew Barker

***The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland** by Clare Lloyd, Mark L. Tasker and Ken Partridge; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1991; 355 pp; 30 b&w plates, many figures and tables, b&w illustrations by Keith Brockie; £20.*

This book is based primarily on the information collected by the NCC and Seabird Group, mainly from 1985 to 1987, to establish the Seabird Colony Register (SCR). The SCR is a major database resource on British and Irish seabird populations against which future population trends may be assessed and conservation priorities determined.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides an overview of seabird biology and the SCR. The British Isles, situated on the edge of a continental shelf with areas of high marine productivity adjacent to abundant nesting sites, are home to over 5 million pairs of 24 regularly breeding species of seabirds. The adaptations of the various Families of seabirds to exploit different feeding niches in this system are outlined. In the second chapter, the manner in which seabird numbers vary and the range of factors which may influence populations are discussed at some length. Particular attention is given to the complexity of the marine food web and the consequent difficulties in monitoring prey stocks and in unravelling cause and effect in population changes of species at all levels in the system. The Shetland sandeel story is a particular illustration of this general problem for seabird biologists. Although generally well written, I felt that these first two chapters were slightly repetitive in parts and could, perhaps, have been rather differently structured. Chapter 3 is aimed at the specialist reader and provides a detailed account of the types of data held in the SCR and the methods used to collect and analyse it. The instructions and recording forms used are reproduced in an Appendix.

A fulmar flies past *Arthur Gilpin*

Part 2 consists of individual accounts for each of the 24 species breeding regularly in the British Isles. Each account begins with a brief introduction to the bird and a summary of its international distribution and status. Information on specific census techniques and difficulties preface the main section on the bird's status in the British Isles. Map figures show the location and size of colonies both throughout the British Isles and, where appropriate, in particular centres of population. Further details are given in comprehensive tables. Population trends are described and contributory factors discussed. The volume and accuracy of the information available varies greatly. Diurnal, surface nesting species, limited to relatively few colonies, such as the gannet, are extremely well documented while, at the other end of the spectrum, it is possible to arrive only at order of magnitude estimates for most colonies of burrow-nesting petrels and population trends are difficult to assess.

Overall, this book admirably achieves what it sets out to. The individual species accounts are well presented and provide both concise overviews of interest to the general reader together with detailed information of value to the specialist. A gazetteer is provided to enable all references to individual sites to be easily located. Keith Brockie's illustrations and the photographic plates enhance the text. This book is a must on the shelves of any seabird enthusiast.

Kate Thompson

***Britain's Birds in 1989-90: the conservation and monitoring review**. Ed. D.A. Stroud & D. Glue. NCC/BTO, Thetford, 1991. 216pp. £6.95.*

Intended as the first of an ongoing series, this book brings together, in summary form, up-to-date information on a wide variety of bird-related topics. Since much of this informtion is not readily available outwith NCC and other specialist reports, the proposed series should provide a valuable reference source for many birdwatchers.

The first section is concerned with conservation and covers matters such as progress in the protection of important and threatened sites, the development of conservation strategies for goose management, birds dependent upon pastoral agriculture, and vulnerable and dispersed species, and the continuing problem of illegal poisoning.

Project reports make up roughly half the book and range from such familiar and nationwide projects as the CBC and Seabird Colony Register to less well-known local studies on Greenshanks and habitat change, and the monitoring of breeding Snow Buntings. A useful summary of the weather in 1989-90 prefaces this second section, and many of the short reviews conclude by inviting readers to participate in projects or to write for further details. Nearly all the projects reviewed have relevance to birdwatching in Scotland.

The final section comprises brief accounts of most species, other than rarities, which breed or winter in Britain, and for which some monitoring data are available. These incorporate information on present trends, population estimates, breeding success and, where appropriate, qualifying levels for national and international significance and numbers at important sites.

No fewer than nine pages of references, dating mostly from the 1980s and 1990 and including a number of papers still 'in press', are given, making this book a useful source for those wishing to follow up an interest in the topics covered.

Valerie M. Thom

"Atlas des Oiseaux de France en Hiver" edited by D Yeatman-Berthelot; Société Ornithologique de France 1991; 575 pp, numerous line drawings and maps; FFr 350.

There was a time when worthwhile bird books were a rare species in France. Equally, there was a time not so long ago when virtually all books published in France seemed to be printed on recycled newsprint and their pages were apparently cut, if at all, by myopic chimpanzees armed with blunt scissors. Happily, these days are now past, and this book is a triumphant vindication of the French publishing industry. Its general appearance will immediately conjure up to British birdwatchers the name "Poyser", and indeed in format and illustration it is strongly reminiscent of, although larger than, our own "Wintering Birds". In many respects, however, it is far from being merely an imitation of its British equivalent.

To begin with, its origins stretch further back, even though it has been published later. Laurent Yeatman started work on this book as soon as he had finished his pioneering *Atlas des Oiseaux Nicheurs de France* in 1976. Sadly, he did not live to see its completion, and it was his daughter who was left to bring the work to its eminently satisfactory conclusion. Secondly, its title deliberately avoids the rigours of deciding what is and what is not a "wintering bird" by describing "birds in winter". Thus the book records all birds seen in France between the arbitrary dates of 1st December and 20th February in any of the four winters from December 1977 to February 1981.

Obviously this approach does have some drawbacks: the severe winter of 1978-79 was very atypical, and the recording of storm-driven waifs such as a little auk in the Massif Central is perhaps of purely ephemeral interest. This is however more than outweighed by the editor's decision to include more than one map per species where she felt it justified. Thus in addition to the main map, the curlew enjoys the benefit of no fewer than three supplementary maps: one showing its breeding areas in 1970-75, another its distribution in the mild winter of 1977-8 and a third for the hard winter of 1978-79. The overall picture so gained is of inestimable value. All resident birds are given an inset map of breeding range, and the varying effects of mild and severe winters are vividly illustrated in the case of birds such as waders and wildfowl, while an irruption of *macrorhynchos* nutcrackers is clearly differentiated from the resident *caryocaractes* population.

The scale of the maps is rather smaller than we are accustomed to; the adoption of a "square" of approximately 20 × 27 km, based on the maps of the Institut Géographique National, gives a relatively broad-brush treatment, but one which seems perfectly adequate for the overall picture required. Of more significance perhaps is the fact that in most cases there is no way of indicating population densities; the above-mentioned little auk has exactly the same symbol in the same square as the starling. For only a few species is this weakness rectified: stock doves and wood pigeons, for example, are given differently sized circles, four and five in number respectively, according to their population size. It is perhaps a carping criticism to wish that this system had been adopted for more species; the fact remains that this book is a major contribution to French – and European – ornithology which has whetted my appetite to return to France.

Michael Murphy

Granivorous Birds in the Agricultural Landscape *edited by Jan Pinowski and Denis Summers-Smith; Polish Scientific Publishers, Warsaw; 1990; 360pp; $50.00 softback; ISBN 83 01 08460 X.*

This is a collection of papers presented at a conference of the Working Group on Granivorous Birds of the International Association for Ecology (Intecol), held in North America in 1986. The damage caused by birds to grain crops is of great economic importance and this is a valuable summary of work in this field. It is a pity that publication has been long delayed but a credit to the Polish Academy of Sciences for undertaking it.

William Harper

The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Ornithology *edited by Michael Brooke and Tim Birkhead; Cambridge University Press; 1991; 362pp; £24.95 hardback; ISBN 0 521 36205 9.*

This is a very different type of book from the "Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Birds" by Chris Perrins (reviewed in SBN 21). It is a series of essays on all aspects of life and study of birds, by an international team of ornithologists, supported by a wealth of clear drawings and colour photographs. In addition a series of special features includes a short account of Charles Sibley's work on DNA – DNA hybridization from which he has derived a revised family tree of the evolution of birds. A very up-to-date feature. The whole book is well written and is strongly recommended.

William Harper

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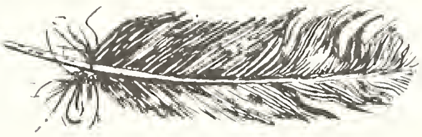
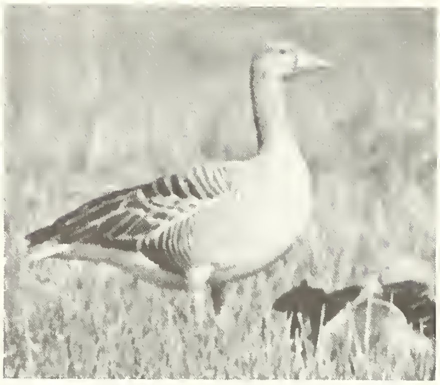
Wildfowling or wildfowl slaughter

Increasing concern has been felt recently over the growing trend towards "wildfowling tourism". Scotland has become an ever more popular goal for foreign "sportsmen", particularly from Italy, who are prepared to spend large sums of money on their hobby. A price of £1375 was quoted in "Scotland on Sunday", for which sum a customer would get a flight from Milan, accommodation and five days' shooting. He could expect at least three geese a day, but this was described as the minimum: "seven, eight, ten, or even twenty is possible. You never know". Anne-Marie Smout, our Fife chairman, believes that pinkfoot numbers at one prime site, Cameron Loch, have declined to half the 12,000 which were present five or six years ago. Not only are unacceptable numbers of birds killed, but many are maimed and not retrieved. In addition, it is suspected that protected species have been shot along with legitimate quarry, and that illegal lures and illegal shotguns have been used. Local opposition is however growing and has found articulate spokesmen apart from Anne-Marie: Mike Scott-Hayward, a North-East Fife councillor and Scottish chairman of Tory Green Initiative, has been an oustpoken critic. We wish him and his colleagues success in their efforts.





Greylag goose *Bobby Smith*

NCCS Grant for Inner Tay Reserve Study

In a joint venture with Dundee and Perth and Kinross District Councils the NCCS has announced that it is to provide 50% (£12,360) of the funds required to carry out a feasibility study designed to examine local attitudes and options in relation to the possible designation of a Local Nature Reserve on the inner Tay Estuary (SBN 21). The feasibility study will be co-ordinated by a steering group including representatives of the District Councils, NCCS, landowners, ornithologists, wildfowlers and other interested parties. A spokesman for the NCCS stated that "the study will provide pointers to better safeguards, not only for the rich wildlife resources, but also for specialist groups of users such as local wildfowlers, naturalists and others who live or work near to the estuary and enjoy its natural features at close hand".

Poison disposal scheme

All readers of SBN will be familiar with the sorry tales we have carried in the past about poisoned birds of prey. An initiative has now been launched which could go some way to diminishing the number of birds apparently killed "by accident". The National Pesticides Retrieval Scheme gives farmers and landowners the opportunity to have pesticides collected and safely disposed of; it is hoped that this will encourage anyone with stocks of banned pesticides to get rid of them legally. In the words of Dave Dick of the RSPB, this in effect amounts to an amnesty. One can only hope that landowners who do have unwanted pesticides will take advantage of it.

National parks ruled out

It came as no surprise when the Scottish Secretary, Ian Lang, decided in September to rule out the concept of national parks as a means of protecting Scotland's mountain areas. The "Scotsman" speculated that the decision had been taken primarily on economic grounds dictated by financial constraints. Criticism of the decision has however been widespread. Roger Carr, the Chairman of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, has said that he nevertheless remains convinced that a national park mechanism is the most appropriate solution, while Harold Eidsvik, a former director of National Parks Canada, speaking in October at the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, pointed out the irony of the fact that the founding fathers of the Canadian national parks had been Scottish. "Why", he asked, "have you exported so many fine men and not imported such a fine project?"

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £43.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £100.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £15 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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SOC Notices

200 Club

Following the repainting of the Waterston Library in the summer, members' subscriptions enabled us to give it a new carpet in October. We have also repainted the small toilet on the ground floor, and the larger one in the basement. A very warm 'thank you' to all members who helped complete this much needed work.

Winners in the second quarter of 1991 were:

July: 1st £30 – Dr A.M. Insh, Hamilton; 2nd £20 – S.F. Jackson, Falmouth; 3rd £10 – Mrs E.M. Hissett, Ayr.

August: 1st £30 – Mrs P. Collett, Thurso; 2nd £20 – Mrs B. Gray, Glenrothes; 3rd £10 – Mrs B. Lennox, Melrose.

September: 1st £30 – I.V. Balfour Paul, Gatehouse-of-Fleet; 2nd £20 – N. Elkins, Cupar; 3rd £10 – Miss J. Banks, Forres.

For details of joining (there are still a few spare numbers) please contact me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. Melrose 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Seabird Group Conference – Glasgow, 27–29 March 1992

The theme of the conference is European Seabirds, partly in keeping with the wider European integration that will be occurring in political and administrative spheres in 1992. The conference will be held at the excellent Kelvin Conference Centre in Glasgow and the cost of the full weekend £92.00. To register or for further information, please contact Dr R W Furness (Seabird Group), Department of Zoology, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ.

A number of papers have been offered so far, and these include Geir Gabrielsen on Energetics, Henri Weimerskirch on Feeding Wandering Albatrosses (OK they're not exactly European, but ...), Etienne Danchin on Kittiwakes, Mike Harris on Shag diets, Sarah Wanless on Shag diving and feeding, and Pat Monaghan and Bob Furness, each on different aspects of the Shetland/Sandeel situation. Clearly some topical and exciting stuff! The programme is not yet full, so if you would like to offer a 20 min paper, or a poster, please send an abstract to Tim Birkhead, Department of Animal & Plant Sciences, PO Box 601, The University, Sheffield S10 2UQ.

BOU Annual Conference 1992

To be held at Durham University, from Thursday evening 19 March to Sunday lunch 22 March. The theme of the conference is *Territoriality, Site Fidelity and Natal Philopatry in Birds: Comparisons Between and Within Species*, and speakers will include N.B. Davies (Cambridge), A.A. Dhondt (Antwerp) and L. Gustafsson (Uppsala). Further details can be obtained from Murray Grant, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE.

Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report 1990 by Donald Watson

£2.50 + stamp from J E Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbright DG7 3UW (also back numbers at reduced prices).

Dumfries Branch Meetings – Please Note

Winter meetings for Dumfries branch are now held in the High School rather than the County Buildings.

Lothian Bird Report 1990

Available in person from Regent Terrace at £4.00 or by post at £4.25 from Oonagh McGarry, Burnfoot Cottage, Symington Mains, Stow, Galashiels TD1 2SU.

Thanks

The September issue of SBN was packed by Peter Gordon, Graham Clark, Gordon Anderson, Rosemary Davidson, Julie Randall, Calum Scott, Tom Gillies, Joan Wilcox, Margot Cruft, Ruaraidh Hamilton, Stewart Ward, Mary Black, Ken MacKenzie, Mike Wilkins, David Kelly, Brian Robertson, John Wood, Mr & Mrs Abel and Mr & Mrs Smith; our sincere thanks go to them all.

Re-carpeting of the Library

The library has now been re-carpeted thanks to the generosity of the 200 club yet again. A few members came in to help pack away some of the books to enable this work to be done and our thanks go to them. Joan Wilcox, Bob & Betty Smith, Graham Clark and Angus Erskine. Members might be forgiven if they do not recognise 21 Regent Terrace now, thanks to all the improvements carried out to make the place more comfortable for visitors and staff. This work has all been carried out by the 200 Club and we are extremely grateful to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe and the 200 club members.

Tayside Raptor Study Group

The Tayside Raptor Study Group was formed at a meeting at Perth on 11th September 1991. The Group will co-ordinate raptor monitoring and studies in Tayside Region, an area previously split between the North-East R.S.G. and the Central Scotland R.S.G. Co-ordinator of the new Group is Keith Brockie.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing, although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to *Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Munlochy, Ross-shire IV8 8ND*

Sales Items

SOC Sweatshirt Navy with pocket-size SOC logo. Small, Medium, Large and Ex Large.	£10.50
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SOC Fieldlist A pocket-sized checklist of all species regularly occurring in Scotland. New reduced price.	£ .50
SOC Checklist An annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. New reduced price.	£ 1.00

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SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family	£360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family	£10.00

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 31 December for the March number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

Red Kites

As part of the NCC/RSPB re-introduction programme a further 20 red kites have been released in the Scottish highlands this summer. *Please notify RSPB Highland Office at Munlochy, Ross-shire immediately of any sightings by telephone if possible. Tel. 0463 81 496/222.*

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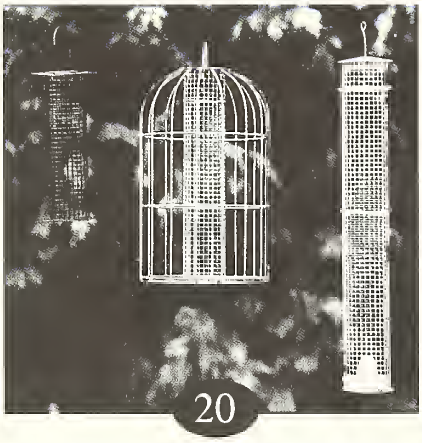

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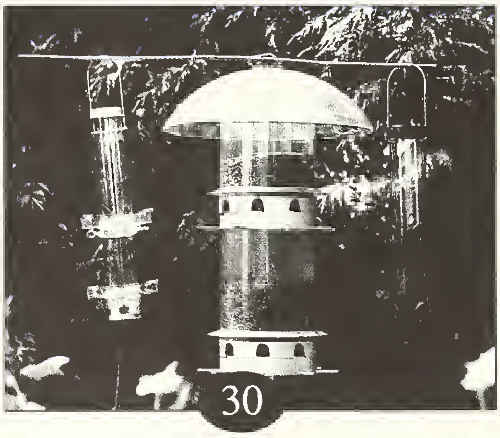

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish Bird News

MARCH 1992 No. 25
ISSN 0268-3200

Edited by Sylvia Laing, Michael Murphy and Kate Thompson

SMITHSONIAN
MAY 15 1992
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Waxwing Colour-Ringing Project

The Waxwing is an irregular, irruptive winter visitor to Britain. Numbers appearing in this country are influenced by the availability of Rowan berries near their breeding grounds in Northern Scandinavia and Russia.

In the first half of the 1980s Waxwings were fairly scarce in Britain with only scattered records of small numbers, mainly along the East coast. The latter half of the 80s and early 90s however, have seen the welcome return of larger winter influxes.

These recent invasions must remind some of the (dare I say it) older SOC members of the halcyon days in the late 1950s and 60s when it was more unusual not to see Waxwings during the winter months. These irruptions were excellently summarised in Scottish Birds by A.T. MacMillan (1959, 1960, 1962 and 1964) and M.J. Everett (1967) and in British Birds by R.K. Cornwallis (1961) and R.K. Cornwallis and A.D. Townsend (1968).

Waxwing Ringing

Grampian Ringing Group have been colour-ringing Waxwings since 1988 in an effort to find out a bit more about this species dispersal within Britian.

The invasions we have studied so far have involved fairly large Waxwing numbers arriving in Britain during late October and November, similar to the influxes of 1959, 1961 and 1963 (MacMillan). An interesting feature of these earlier invasions into Scotland was the rapid through passage of birds. Large numbers present in November had apparently moved on by mid-December, leaving only small wintering groups.

Prior to our study there had been several ringing movements to indicate the destinations of dispersing Waxwings. Two ringed in Aberdeen in November 1970 turned up in Liverpool and Sheffield in spring 1971, a bird ringed in Ayr in January 1971 was found dead in Wales in March 1971 while a bird ringed in Fife in November 1974 was found dead in West Germany in February 1975.

The 1990/91 Colour-Ringing Results

Birdwatchers from Inverness to Bedfordshire helped with Grampian Ringing Group's colour-ringing project during the 1990/91 invasion.

We caught and colour-ringed 180 Waxwings in and around Aberdeen during November 1990 when numbers in the region were at their peak. As expected most of these birds soon moved on. Thanks to a tremendous response from birders across the country we were able to follow this dispersal in greater detail than ever before.

The first map shows the distribution and number of colour-ringed Waxwing sightings received between mid-December 1990 and early May 1991. It clearly shows a large scale southerly movement from Grampian into Southern Scotland and Northern and Central England during the winter.

As each bird was uniquely colour-ringed we had the added bonus of receiving sightings of 15 individual birds at more than one locality. The second map shows a selection of the multiple movements received during the project.

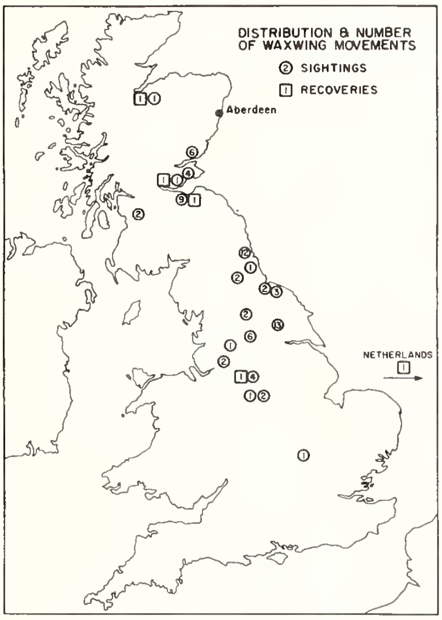


Figure 1 Shows distinct southerly movement from Grampian.

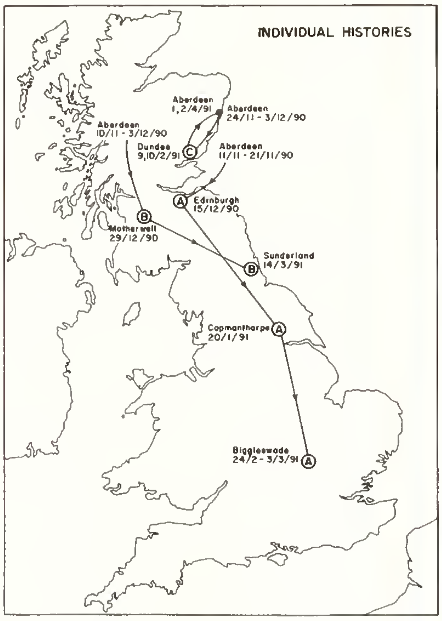
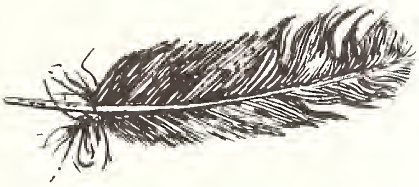


Figure 2 Movements of individual birds ringed in Grampian.

Further Information

I would be grateful for any colour-ringed Waxwings sightings which may not have been passed on to me yet. **I am particularly eager to receive further details of a possible colour-ringed bird seen at Gullane in Lothian sometime during November 1990.**



Cheers

It's a grateful thanks to everyone who contributed to the project and helped build up this interesting picture of Waxwing dispersal within Britain.

Please keep your eyes peeled for colour-ringed Waxwings again in future winters. There have been no ringing movements to confirm whether the same birds return to Britain in subsequent invasions. One of the few records of a Waxwing returning to an area outwith its normal wintering range was a Hungarian bird which returned five years later.

Raymond Duncan, 11 Fairview Park,
Danestone, Aberdeen AB22 8ZF

SOC Conference 1991

It is a pity that the perils of the recession served to reduce numbers at the 1991 conference in North Berwick, as it proved to be excellent value for the 250 members and guests who did attend. As folk gathered on Friday evening, a brisk trade in the bar helped to generate a suitably relaxed frame of mind among the audience for the opening slide show. This featured a Sanderling movie, the scenery and wildlife of the Falkland Islands and, at the opposite end of the earth, Spitzbergen and the Pribilofs, miraculously free of their notorious fog banks. The show was rounded off by a showing of the photographic competition entries which were wide ranging in choice of subject but of universally excellent standard. The winning entry was a Water Rail by Edmund Fellowes.

The theme of the conference was waders and so the talks on Saturday were very appropriately kicked off with an overview of waders in Scotland and the international conservation significance of our breeding and wintering populations. Despite his protestations of having been away from active wader work for some time, Tony Prater clearly still has his fingers firmly on the wader conservation pulse. His talk included an interesting discussion of the influence of decisions defining population boundaries on conservation perspectives.

Des Thompson's talk on Dotterel was superbly crafted and gave a fascinating overview of the complexities of this species' ecology as unravelled by the hard work of his research group. Dotterels are affected by myriad aspects of their environment including habitat, which is itself affected by factors such as grazing pressure and pollution and the timing of tipulid hatchings. Their social organisation is another intriguing component of their population dynamics.

Nigel Buxton then illustrated the features of the habitats of the Outer Isles which make them so attractive to high densities of breeding waders and discussed the impact of EC funded agricultural improvement schemes on wader populations. Fortunately, it seems that the impact of most of these developments may be relatively minor in the long term, with the exception of pipe drainage behind the machair.

The Saturday afternoon weather was rather bracing and, in combination with the final of the rugby world cup, somewhat diminished the numbers of outward bound birdwatchers. Aberlady was reportedly pretty nippy, but Tyninghame was reasonably sheltered and offered a pleasant opportunity to walk off a little of the very ample lunch. For those who stayed at the hotel, St Anne's Books, Bill and Hetty Harper, Charles Frank optics and the artwork exhibition plus the recorders' meeting offered a variety of tempting opportunities to deplete the wallet.

After the difficulties faced by the Club in recent years, it was reassuring to attend an AGM where the mood was generally optimistic and where the business discussed included such weighty matters as the length of the Club tie and noise level at the disco. The dinner dance was very enjoyable with entertaining after-dinner speeches, the raffle draw and a good variety of music to suit all tastes and dancing styles.

For some reason, attendance at breakfast on Sunday was somewhat limited, but the talks held more appeal and drew a full house. David Bryant looked at wintering waders in Scotland and the threats posed to them by factors such as land claim, nutrient enrichment of estuaries, fly ash tipping and growing recreational demands. Possible approaches to wader protection include zoning of estuaries to accommodate the diverse range of demands placed on them while minimising conflicts of interest and the creation of freshwater habitats adjacent to them.

Ray Murray's teaching background was apparent in his expert use of overlays on overhead transparencies to illustrate changes in wader distribution in Scotland over the past decade as revealed by the Atlas. His illustrations from the Lothian Atlas demonstrated just how much more detail on bird distribution in relation to habitat is gained when survey results are recorded and analysed on a tetrad, rather than 10km square, scale.

Philip Whitfield provided a fascinating insight into the individuality of Turnstone in those superficially apparently uniform flocks. Social ranking and survival rates are closely linked to feeding technique and largely determined by arrival date at the wintering ground. The stunning slides of the birds' Ellesmere Island breeding ground must surely have given more than one member of the audience itchy feet.

John Busby rounded off the conference with a marvellous working demonstration of how he turns a few carefully placed lines and areas of shade into beautiful images of preening Godwits.

Many thanks to Sylvia Laing, Michael Murphy, Frank Hamilton and all those who made the 1991 conference such an enjoyable occasion.

Kate Thompson

Purple Sandpiper *R J Chandler*
A common winter visitor to parts of Britain's rocky coastline

Tay Estuary Study

Local conservationist David Bell began work in October to examine the feasibility of a twenty square mile-plus nature reserve being formed on the Tay Estuary, SBN 21.3. The study is being jointly funded by the local district councils and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. Although Tayside wildfowlers first suggested a nature reserve on the estuary during the late 1960s and the proposal was taken up by conservation and amenity bodies, nothing so far has come of it.

Co-operation on all sides would ensure that, if established, the benefits to the rich bird life along with other wildlife in this unique area would be enormous.

Carrion feeding attempted by a Common Eider

On 30 July 1991 I observed an Eider attempting to feed from a dead gull on the sea off the Isle of May. I spotted the Eider from the promontory NW of Pilgrim's Haven while I was completing a bird count. About 30m off the opposite side of the haven, the Eider was difficult to age but was either an adult female or large immature. It was tugging and plucking at a dead gull eventually identified as a juvenile Kittiwake. The attention of two other Eiders drew them (also females or large Imm.) to the scene, but they did not join in this strange behaviour nor was there any aggression from them or the would-be feeder. It is unlikely that an Eider's bill could allow successful carrion feeding and BWP records no vertebrate food being taken except fishes. The individual I observed was certainly persistent, its vigorous behaviour continuing without change as I moved on to complete my count over 10 minutes later.

Alastair Whitelaw

Power Cable casualties in the Clyde Valley

Following our front page article in *SBN* 22 we now have an update on the situation.

Report for 1991

This report details the power cable casualties for 1991. The site which has been brought to the attention of several conservation bodies and of course Scottish Power, lies in the Clyde valley. The cables run from Netherton in Motherwell (NS765545) across the valley to Ferniegair nr Larkhall (NS761543), thus dividing Merryton/Carbarns from the RSPB reserve at Barons Haugh. Historically, such areas are abundant haunts for wildfowl, particularly in the winter months. Merryton and Carbarns has been a traditional site for wintering flocks of both Mute and Whooper Swan, the latter appearing in numbers of national importance.

An encounter in January 1990 revealed several remains of birds beneath the cables. Monitoring this 'hot-spot' thereafter revealed more casualties, as detailed below:

Species	*1991*	*Total 90/91*
Cormorant	–	1
Heron	2	2
Mute Swan	2	9
Whooper Swan	4	9
Swan sp	4	4
Wigeon	8	8
Teal	6	9
Mallard	2	6
Pochard	–	1
Goldeneye	1	1
Goosander	–	1
Duck sp	5	5
Coot	1	2
Curlew	–	2
Black headed Gull	2	3
Lesser B B Gull	2	4
Herring Gull	2	3
Gull sp	2	2
Feral Pigeon	1	1
Wood Pigeon	1	1
Rook	–	1
Carrion Crow	–	1
Redwing	–	1
	45	78

On several occasions during September to December when regular swan activity between Barons Haugh and Merryton was noted, birds have been seen trying to take evasive action to avoid collision with the cables.

Other problems in assessing accurate counts of casualties

Flooding was noted on several occasions, which not only increased the number of birds using the area, but prevented access, thus avoiding disturbance of the large flock including 90+ swans. During times of flood it is quite conceivable to speculate that several casualties occur and are then washed away. The presence of a Fox scavenging beneath the cables on a regular basis may also reduce the number of casualties being recorded.

Possible solutions

Two 'on site' meetings with Scottish Power have taken place, but the options so far discussed include the use of dayglo balls suspended on the earth wire and attaching neon lighting to the live cables; needless to say these solutions though worth investigating and considering are very expensive to install.

At present, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) are researching power line strikes on a nationwide basis in co-operation with nine out of ten electrical companies, and it is hoped that since this investigation Scottish Power (the only company who had not responded) will now become involved in trying to find a solution to this problem.

Correspondence with the WWT revealed that the South West Electricity Board (SWEB) have been most diligent in their recordings of swan strikes with a view to introducing spheres on cables that are repeatedly hit. They believe that such indicators have been very effective with no swans hitting the marked wires. The SWEB have also indicated that no strikes occur between the hours of midnight and 5am, although most strikes occur in the early morning, and during daylight hours, possibly when the birds are moving between roosting and feeding areas.

It is hoped that a satisfactory solution can be found to this major problem before too long.

Anybody wishing further information about this site may like to contact **Iain English, at 21 Grant Court, Avon Grove, Hamilton ML3 7UT.**

Editor's note – Perhaps this problem is more widespread than thought; if you know of any areas in which such a problem occurs perhaps now is the time to do something about it and put pressure on Scottish Power to find a solution.

Lesser Black-backed Gull
Another species of power cable casualties

S da Prato

Atlas Work

I read with interest in the last issue of Scottish Bird News that the fieldwork for the new atlas is now complete. It struck me initially that this sort of work is never really finished and the proverbial painting of the Forth Bridge came to mind. Until this year, I have often wondered what keeps people coming back for more.

This year has seen the start of the fieldwork for a bird atlas of Fife. I say atlas, but in effect the plural would be more appropriate, for running in tandem for this year and the next four is the fieldwork for a breeding atlas and a monthly distribution atlas. I agreed, for my sins, to take on a number of tetrads and five kilometre squares. The task at first seemed totally daunting – it being my first attempt at such work.

Shortly after I was allocated my squares, early in the year, with the snow lying thick on the ground, I set forth in my car to reconnoitre the area and plan my attack. I thought it might be useful to establish a route noting on the way where it might be possible to abandon the car without causing a nuisance to farmers. After sliding about for two hours, losing sight of the road and almost getting stuck on a couple of occasions, I worked out that I could cover ninety per cent of the network of roads and lanes without repeating myself. As for places to stop I decided to leave that for another trip. I recall that my over-riding thought on returning to civilisation, and the warmth of my centrally heated house, was how enormous a ten kilometre by five kilometre piece of countryside is.

My second excursion saw the weather more hospitable, almost spring-like, so much so I even ventured out of the car. Then gradually, as the days lengthened, I set out earlier and earlier in the morning. It slowly dawned, it is not the data (eight hundred thousand separate pieces for the Fife Atlas alone) important as that is, it's certainly not the prospect of seeing new species, but it's the sheer exhilaration of being out there. The magic is being privy to those brief private moments of all sorts of wildlife, not just the birds but a wide diversity of flora and fauna. It's those moments I find difficult to convey in words – watching in a deserted wood a woodpecker excavating its nest hole, a protracted territorial dispute between a Sparrowhawk and a Kestrel, coming face to face with a hunting Fox or approaching a small group of grazing Roe Deer. Ticks in boxes on monthly returns are poor records of that store of enjoyment.

If you have done atlas or survey work I know you will recognise what I can only hint at. If you haven't it's never too late to start. I am sure SOC would like to hear from you.

Brian Downing

Stooping Peregrine *D A Smith*

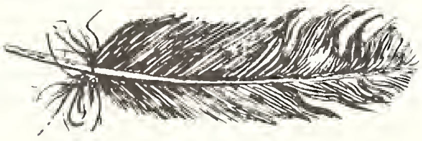
Peregrines calling in Autumn and Winter

I read with interest the note on a peregrine calling in aumumn (*SBN* 7:11) and although peregrines seldom call away from nesting territories, I have recorded them calling five times in winter in West Galloway.

On 13th November 1977 two juvenile peregrines were at a small mixed wood on an inland moor continually chasing each other in spectacular fashion in and out of the trees and over the open moor. They were swooping, diving, chasing and touching talons uttering excited calls for an hour, breaking off now and then to chase wood pigeons, rooks and fieldfares. On 16th January 1980 two adult peregrines flew together across a low-lying moor. One uttered a harsh call before they flew off in opposite directions. On 21st December 1980 an adult peregrine was sitting on a grouse butt on an upland moor, head sunk on its shoulders. It became alert and bobbed its head before uttering 'cacking'' calls as a 'ringtail' hen harrier approached and was swooped on by another adult peregrine which flew away. The first peregrine continued to utter loud calls as the hen harrier circled just above its head; the harrier then flew away. On 3rd February 1985 a male peregrine appeared over farmland carrying lapwing prey and uttering calls as two carrion crows pestered it. He dropped his prey as a female peregrine approached him and both landed at the prey behind some vegetation. On 21st December 1990 a male peregrine was swooping and stooping on a 'ringtail' hen harrier over farmland. The peregrine then turned his attention on a juvenile female peregrine, stooping and attacking it mercilessly, with continuous calling probably from both birds and with the juvenile frequently having to turn over on its back in defence. The male kept up this sustained attack for seven minutes until the juvenile flew away.

R C Dickson

Editor's note: this interesting and long-running correspondence is now closed.



Wildlife Crime

An encouraging trend in the success rate of police action against wild bird lawbreakers is evident from the 1990 figures recently published. While the number of cases reported to the RSPB actually fell to 755, the lowest figure since 1985, the number of successful prosecutions nearly doubled between 1989 and 1990, from 21 to 40.

While the ratio of incidents to prosecutions is not particularly high, the overall trend is to be welcomed.

Illegal Gin Traps

Almost 20 years ago the barbaric gin trap was made illegal – however it is still being used in various parts of Highland Scotland today.

Hugh Brown a warden with the NCCS, recently released a female Pine Marten, a specially protected animal, from a gin trap near Kiltarlity in Invernessshire.

The trap is a particularly cruel way of killing animals and birds as it involves two interlocking sets of metal teeth which spring shut when the unfortunate creature steps on the base plate. The animal then suffers the agony of the trap until it starves to death. In the case of this lucky Pine Marten which was caught by one of its forelegs, the animal in a desperate attempt to free herself had dragged the trap some considerable distance and must have suffered terrible pain before being found.

In addition to gin traps there is much more common misuse of fen traps and self-locking snares which can trap anything from Badgers to Otters and numerous birds including Owls, Buzzards, Sparrowhawk to name but a few.

''Some of this illegal trapping can be put down to ignorance of the law,'' according to Sir John Lister-Kaye, NCCS NW Regional Board Chairman. ''But in many cases, and particularly with regard to gin traps, it is simply malicious flouting of the law and a callous disregard for the suffering of animals.''

''If you look at trapping in the light of the widespread poisoning which we all know goes on in the countryside, then you have to conclude that a significant proportion of our native wildlife is being deliberately destroyed by a misguided, and in some cases criminal minority.''

Merlin study summary 1991

Lammermuirs

A particularly cold late spring resulted in most Merlins getting off to a late start. In one case young could not have fledged before the middle of August. On the other hand one nest was exceptionally early, eggs being laid during the third week of April! Two sites were well occupied but failed before or shortly after egg laying. Ten nests were found, but one scrape was empty when located and the site was unoccupied thereafter. Two nests failed at the small young stage and one before hatching. The early nest fledged before the young could be ringed but at least two were raised from three eggs. Only 15 young were ringed from the remaining five nests. This was the poorest level of success so far during the seven years of the study.

Moorfoots

Eight sites were clearly occupied and at least six reached the egg stage. Two of these failed for uncertain reasons during incubation. In two nests four and three young respectively were ringed. Another brood of five small young were found and some at least fledged. One nest was not located but at least one young fledged from this. A ''normal'' occupation and success rate for this area.

Pentlands

Despite the best coverage for some years this area proved to be very unproductive. None of the known sites showed much sign of occupation. Three other areas were occupied but all apparently failed. Only one of these is known to have laid and that nest only contained one egg.

Alan Heavisides

Merlin with its mind on the job

At the beginning of August, I received a visit at Culterty Field Station, Aberdeenshire, from a German tourist holding a Merlin. Apparently, Herr Rupp had been watching the birds on the Ythan Estuary, standing next to his car with the car door open, when a Starling flew into the car, closely followed by the Merlin. The Merlin killed the Starling, and allowed Herr Rupp to pick him up, and the two birds were then brought in to me. I should explain that many sick and injured birds are handed in to Culterty every year, as people often mistake the University Field Station for some kind of bird hospital! The birds usually now fall to me to deal with, as the resident bird fanatic.

The Merlin and the Starling were placed in a cardboard box, and put into my car for the twelve mile journey into Aberdeen; I intended to have the bird checked over for health, measured and ringed, and released. Throughout the car journey I could hear the Merlin plucking the Starling with gusto, occasionally falling over when I went round corners, and on opening the box I found the Starling almost completely featherless. The Merlin appeared not to want to let go of its prize when I lifted it out of the box. After ringing etc., both birds were placed on the ground, but by this time the Merlin was intent on getting away, and flew off, immediately making a dive at another Starling flying past!

Paul Doyle, Recorder, North Sea Bird Club

SOC/RSPB Breeding Wader Survey 1992-93

Mark O'Brien & Allan Brown

As announced in the last edition of Scottish Bird News this survey aims to produce population estimates of waders breeding on enclosed agricultural land in Scotland and Northern England. Part of the survey will attempt to compare the change in wader numbers with a previous survey, undertaken in 1982/83, which used SOC members to cover large areas of agricultural land.

Monitoring of wader populations on grassland throughout the UK between 1984 and 1988 has been co-ordinated by Ken Smith for the WSG and BTO. 14 Scottish sites were included in this annual scheme. An index of change, calculated from the Scottish sites, suggests that Lapwing numbers remained stable whilst Snipe and Redshank numbers declined by 13 and 32 percent respectively.

The BTO's breeding waders of wet meadows survey compared change in wader numbers between 1982 and 1989 in England and Wales. Lapwing numbers fell by a third, Snipe by 10% whilst Redshank remained stable. Declines in the northern region were, however, not as marked as in the south suggesting that wader populations in the north were not under as great a threat.

It is apparent that we need more information on the numbers and distribution of waders across a wide range of farmland habitats in Scotland. We have decided to split areas of farmland into three types, according to what we know about their breeding wader populations

1) Areas already known to be good for waders. We will have asked SOC recorders, BTO regional reps, NCC(S) staff, and RSPB conservation officers for a list of good breeding wader sites within their area. We would hope to get all of these sites covered over the next two years. If you know of a good site then please let me know – it is better to duplicate than to miss altogether.

2) Those areas surveyed in 1982/83. By the time you read this we will have asked the previous surveyors if they are interested in repeating the survey. We would like to get as many of these sites resurveyed as possible.

3) This leaves the rest of lowland Scotland, about which we know either nothing at all or that it's not particularly good for waders. The RSPB are employing a team of fieldworkers to cover a random selection from these sites.

I anticipate that SOC members would be keen to take part in parts 1 and 2 of this survey. If you are interested in either of these, or if some of you are willing to risk surveying a random site, and haven't already been contacted then please write to me, **Mark O'Brien, c/o SOC Office, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.**

Curlew at nest
Is this species declining on agricultural land?

Wm S Paton

Obviously, it is foolhardy to use a database with a maximum of 14 sites and sometimes as few as 22 birds to record change in wader numbers in Scotland just as it would be ridiculous to extrapolate from trends across English regions. Talking to people 'on the ground' in Scotland indicates that numbers of waders are declining at a disturbing rate. The North East Scotland Atlas found that the number of 10Km squares occupied by Snipe and Redshank had declined since the first BTO atlas. Other regional reports note declines, particularly in Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank. A survey of the Cleish Hills last summer recorded low numbers, 23 pairs of Curlew and single figures for Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe in a total of 48 sq. km. of farmland.

Birds of the River Devon

A timely reminder of the original work which can be carried out by Branches has been served by the publication in the *Forth Naturalist & Historian* Vol 14 of the results of the surveys of the birds of the River Devon by the Stirling branch. Cliff Henty compares data gathered in 1987 with previous surveys in 1977, 1979 and 1982. Four major habitat zones are covered: lowland, central, torrent and hill. A good picture is built up of relative abundance in each of these and evidence is presented of various changes, some transient and some steady, which have occurred over the ten-year period. Altogether, a very praiseworthy and worthwhile effort.

Michael Murphy

Charles Frank

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Corncrake *RSPB*

Capercaillie – Deer Fence Threat

Following our short article in SBN 23.6 regarding the threats to Capercaillie a further note from the RSPB states that Deer fences in Pinewoods – its favourite habitat – are further threatening the species.

The harmful effect of these fences on Capercaillie has been clearly demonstrated in research work carried out by the RSPB in their Abernethy nature reserve. Fences were in place in parts of the forest when the RSPB bought it back in 1988 and were originally put up to protect young trees from deer grazing damage. However, after the situation was monitored by RSPB staff it was found that a number of Capercaillie and Black Grouse were being killed through flying into these high fences. As a result the RSPB has removed all internal fences from within the forest part of the reserve.

Peter Mayhew, RSPB reserves manager for North Scotland, states that although the exact size of the Capercaillie population in Scotland is unknown it is still declining and has entirely vanished from some areas.

The reasons for the decline are many and complex, the deer fences being just one problem.

The 3 year research project, started in 1991, will continue until a solution is found.

New RSPB reserve on Coll

One of Europe's most threatened species, the Corncrake, may benefit from the RSPB's most recent purchase of 4 square miles of coastal grassland on Coll, which they hope to farm in a way suitable to the benefit of Corncrakes.

Once widespread throughout Britain, the population is now down to about 500 pairs, mainly confined to the Western Isles, with Coll and Tiree holding one fifth of the population.

The RSPB's action plan for Corncrakes is described in the Society's recently published 1991 Conservation Review. As part of the plan the RSPB calls on the Government to designate Coll, Tiree, the Western Isles, Orkney and County Fermanagh, Ireland, as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. This would enable farmers and crofters to be rewarded for managing their land in ways which benefit conservation and Corncrakes.

The area on Coll will enable the RSPB to play a major part in conserving this endangered species and demonstrate two new schemes to promote the growing of hay and delay the crop harvesting in areas where Corncrakes breed. Without this help the Corncrake could vanish by the end of the century.

The onus is now on the Government to recognise its international obligations and take steps to ensure a brighter future for the Corncrake and other wildlife of the Hebrides.

Black Grouse
Another victim of Deer fences *R Lambie*

The Battle of Dunnichen – in the 1990's

The battle of Nectansmere, which was fought between the Picts and the Northumbrians on the lower slopes of Dunnichen hill, by Letham, Angus, has long passed, but now another battle rages on around its slopes, the battle to "Save Dunnichen Hill".

In May of 1991 a quarrying company from Forfar bought the West Hill of Dunnichen, and announced that they intended to quarry hard rock from the site. They propose to cut down a wood consisting of Scots pines and some deciduous trees that grows on the top of the hill, then quarry underneath. They would in fact be turning an idyllic country scene in Angus into a major industrial development, with an explosives store, quarrying machines, lorries and porta-cabins littering the site.

At present the hill, which is partly of woodland and partly of rough grazing land, is a nesting site for Green Woodpecker (which have only colonised Angus in the past 20 years), Curlew, Skylark, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Treecreeper, not to mention any of the smaller commoner woodland passerines. Crossbill do not breed but occasionally pass through the area, and Goldfinch search for seeds over the woods and open ground in winter. Badger forage for food in the wood, and squirrels take advantage of the nuts from the trees. All this would be lost should the quarry be allowed.

As soon as it was known that a quarry had been proposed, a group of determined people from the Letham and Dunnichen area formed a "Dunnichen Hill Action Group", and within days petitions had appeared in the local village shops, along with posters urging people to write letters of objection to the Director of Planning, who will make the final decision as to whether the quarry will go ahead or not. Displays and stalls at local events are now commonplace, and the Action Group has been immediately successful in one of its aims: letting people know what is going on. Everyone is eager to help, and you can hardly drive through Letham or Dunnichen without meeting more than one car bearing a "Save Dunnichen Hill" sticker. A distinctive banner appeared on the lower slopes of the hill bearing the same, now familiar phrase.

Away from the publicity side of the campaign, the Action Group employed environmental consultants to write a report objecting to the quarry. They produced a pack of glossy covered reports, complete with colour photographs and diagrams, as well as a clear and informative text. This is available for reference at the Letham Library, and copies have been sent to all the members of the planning committee, to try to convince them how bad this quarry would be, if it goes ahead. Funding a campaign such as this is by no means cheap, and various fund-raising activities are being held. The people of Letham and Dunnichen are doing all they can to prevent Dunnichen Hill from turning into a full scale quarry, and you can help. If you care about losing woodland, grassland and wildlife, say so, and join us in our fight to "Save Dunnichen Hill".

Please write your letters of objection to:– **The Director of Planning, County Buildings, Forfar, ANGUS DD8 3LG.**

Alistair Whyte

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

A recent government announcement of increased support for environmentally sensitive farming is to be welcomed as a further indication of the "greening" of all political parties.

Five new ESAs have been promised for Scotland over the next two years, and the RSPB is recommending an expansion of the network to include the Northern and Western Isles. The endangered Corncrakes of the Western Isles would be greatly helped in this way, beyond the bounds of the new RSPB reserve on Coll which is noted elsewhere in this issue. Steve Sankey, RSPB Regional Officer for South and West Scotland, is quoted as pointing out that "An ESA in the Inner Hebrides would help threatened birds such as Corncrake on Coll, Tiree and Colonsay, or Barnacle and Greenland White-fronted Geese on Islay. I am confident that farmers will take up these voluntary mechanisms which not only help bird conservation but also reward farmers financially for their traditional role as custodians of the countryside.".

Barnacle Goose *A Dowell*

Dark-bellied Brent Geese

A paper received from **Jeff Kirby of The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT)** suggests that Dark-bellied Brent Geese had a good breeding season during 1991. Some 103,000 birds were counted at 18 estuarine sites in Britain between 8 September and 2 December 1991, and the proportions of juveniles present and brood sizes were recorded for many of the flocks. Most of the recorded flocks were observed within intertidal areas, whilst many of those in southern England were on grass. Of 56,293 geese aged, 34.2% were juveniles. This compares favourably with the 34.4% young in 1988 which was the most productive season in recent years.

Barn Owl News

Our front-page article in the last SBN was devoted to the Barn Owl, which has now been promoted to front-page news in the national press. This is thanks to a campaign launched by the RSPB in January. While the appeal for £380,000 to finance Barn Owl work over the next four years is a high target, the RSPB hope to reach it; as one national paper pointed out, a list of the things which most people dislike about changes in the countryside over the past ten or twenty years would be identical with one drawn up by a committee of Barn Owls. The appeal should therefore be a popular one, but as the RSPB's ultimate aim is nothing less than reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, they are faced with the massive inertia of European bureaucracy. We can but hope that they succeed in this mammoth task.

RSPB Post

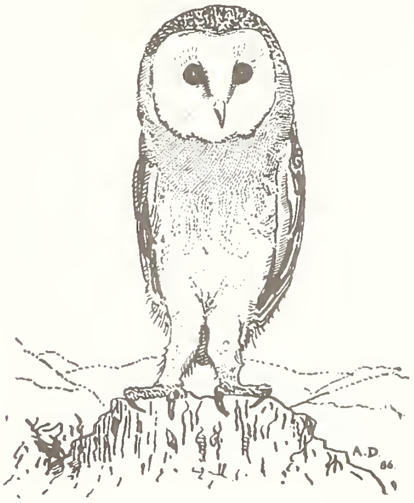
The RSPB is to appoint a conservation officer for Lothian and Borders with effect from April 1992.

The emphasis on the post will be to liaise with all organisations and major landowners which influence wild bird conservation, particularly with respect to the Firth of Forth and the uplands.

The post will be part of the RSPB's new South and West Scotland regional team based in Glasgow, although the post holder will work from home within Lothian and Border.

Liaison with the SOC will be a high priority. Watch this space for further information!

Steve Sankey



Barn Owl *A Dowell*

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
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N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

Birdwatching on Islay

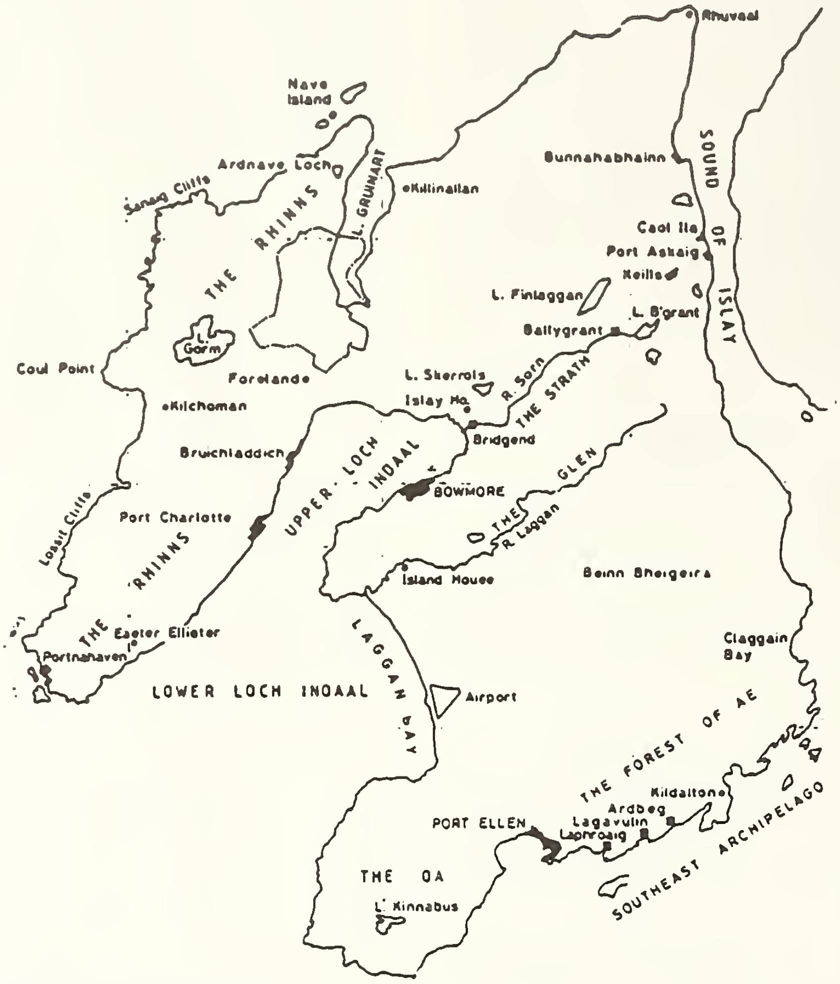
The island of Islay is not very large, about 25 × 18 miles (40 × 30 km), but packed within these bounds is a considerable diversity of bird habitats. Two large, sheltered sealochs, Gruinart and Indaal, each with extensive inter-tidal flats, attract divers, grebes, ducks and waders in great variety. Both provide roosts for the famous wintering flocks of Barnacle Geese which spread inland to feed on the adjacent farmland. Freshwater lochs abound and though many are acid and so poor for birds, a few are richer, being on limestone or shell sand. Two rivers and innumerable small burns drain the land. Natural woodland is reduced to small areas of mostly scrubby growth but the Victorian landowners planted broad-leaved woods in several areas, while more recent conifer plantations have, fortunately, been reasonably constrained in area while providing good feeding and nesting cover both for small woodland birds and for birds of prey. The coasts of Islay, extending to some 135 miles (c.220 km), include cliffs, long sandy strands, low rocky shores and many tiny islets.

Sea Lochs

The two sealochs provide some of the finest birdwatching on the island. Much of Loch Gruinart, together with farmland and moorland round its western and southern sides, form the RSPB Loch Gruinart Reserve. Purchased in 1983 as one of the key areas for Barnacle Geese, the farmland has been managed for the geese, with rotational reseeds and fertiliser providing the birds, when they arrive in October, with lots of good grass. This holds them on the reserve and relieves farmers elsewhere on the island of some of the agricultural damage which the geese can undoubtedly cause.

There is only one small hide on the reserve, plus a visitor centre to be opened this year, but the whole goose area can be observed from roads which run through it. Indeed, driving slowly along the central road, pulling in at the frequent lay-bys beside flock after flock of Barnacle Geese is a birdwatching experience of which I never tire. As many as 18,000 geese can be present in late October. When northerly winds blow in early October and so provide the geese with a free boost to their migration from Iceland, up to 10,000 can arrive within a day. Mixed in the Barnacle flocks are often odd other geese, including Brent, Pinkfeet and small Canadas.

Although the reserve is principally about geese, there are also areas of flooded marsh, heather moorland and woods, with Corncrake, Buzzard and Hen Harrier all breeding. The goose fields resound in spring to gyrating Lapwings, drumming Snipe and clamouring Redshanks. Loch Gruinart itself dries out at low tide and the considerable numbers of duck and waders are not always easy to see, though the road on the east side does allow some areas to be overlooked.



Map of Islay
Ordnance Survey Map Landranger No 60 1:50 000 series

Loch Indaal, by contrast, must be one of the most accessible good birding spots in the country. A convenient road, if with insufficient lay-bys, hugs the shore from Bowmore to Bruidladdich, enabling one to view both the tidal sandflats at the head of the loch, where Curlew, Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwits and Dunlin occur in hundreds, and Ringed Plover, Redshank, Knot, Grey Plover and others in at least tens, and also the shallow water, on which winters one of the largest flocks of Scaup in Britain, reaching 1500 on occasion. They are often close inshore near Bowmore, where there is a convenient elevated watching place opposite the electricity generating station, just outside the village heading north.

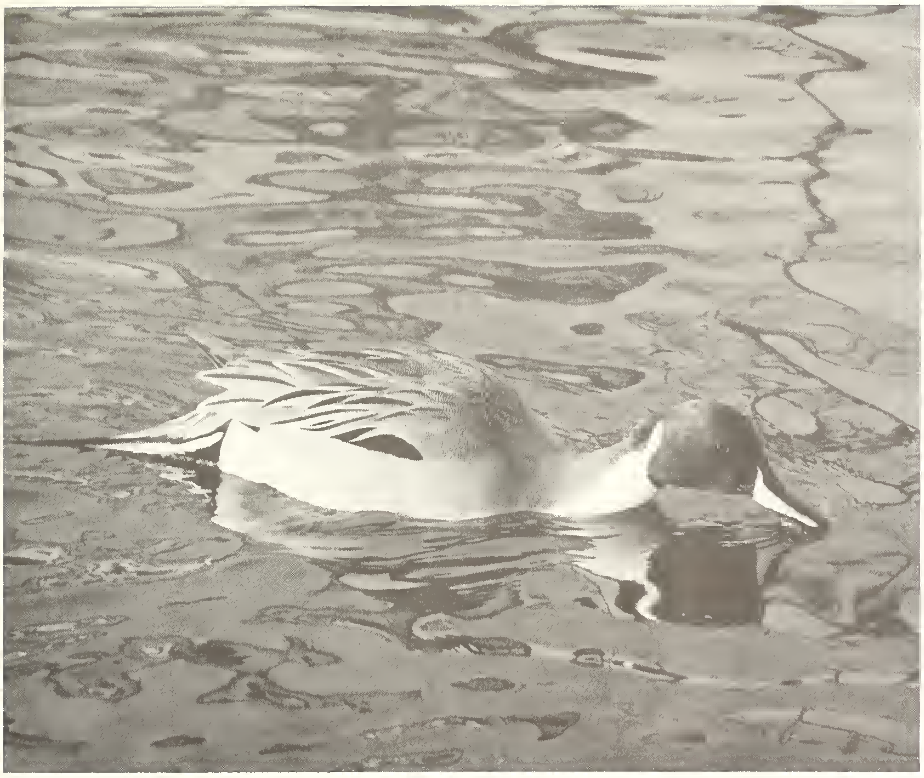
Among the Scaup or around and about will be found up to 50 Slavonian Grebes, large flocks of Eiders, perhaps 25 Goldeneye, a dozen Long-tailed Ducks, the occasional Smew, plenty of Whooper and Mute Swans, and, closer inshore, several hundred Wigeon, among which can be found both Pintail and Shoveler. Further out on the loch, and often better seen from Bruidladdich, are up to 150 Common Scoters (not just in winter, but throughout the year), as well as all three species of divers, Great Northern and Red-throated often exceeding 20 in number. Over 300 Red-breasted Mergansers moult there in late summer.

Between Bridgend to Bruidladdich is Blackrock, a small offshore stack, where Arctic and Common Terns nest. Then comes a two-mile strand divided by a shingle split. This is a good place for Turnstones and is remarkably favoured by Glaucous Gulls which sometimes stay through the year. The rocky shore in front of Bruichladdich village is the place for Purple Sandpipers, from about November to May.

The numbers of birds given above refer to the winter months, but Loch Indaal is never empty. Wader passage occurs in April and May, with a few Sanderling present through June, too. Return passage starts in July and by August flocks of Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Dunlin occur, with the occasional Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint thrown in.

Inland Areas

Inland, Islay presents many good birdwatching opportunities. Walks through the Victorian woodlands at Bridgend and Ballygrant are described in a booklet published by the Islay and Jura Marketing Group and available from the Tourist Office in Bowmore. Tits, Treecreeper and finches can be found in winter, also good numbers of Woodcock. In summer, these woods are filled with bird song, among which listen for Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Redstart, all potential breeders though proof has been lacking in



Drake Pintail *S J Clarke*

most recent years. Wood Warblers are locally common, as are Siskin, Redpoll and Tree Pipit. Signposted off the Bridgend-Ballygrant road is the Woollen Mill, well worth a visit in its own right while Dippers and Grey Wagtails nest on the River Sorn close by.

The largest freshwater loch, Loch Gorm, near to the west coast, is ornithologically disappointing. It is too windswept to hold many birds, though a few ducks nest. The surrounding farmland and low-lying boggy pools are winter home to about 2000 Greenland White-fronted Geese. Up to 9000 of these geese are, in fact, widely distributed over the whole island, but the Loch Gorm area is as good as any for seeing them close to.

West Coast

Out on the west coast are more of Islay's rather small seabird colonies, amounting to perhaps 2-3000 pairs each of Guillemot and Razorbill and rather fewer Kittiwakes. None are particularly accessible and it is best to leave them be. The different species can be seen offshore all round the island as well as from the ferry. Fulmars occur quite widely, including over half-a-mile inland on cliffs behind Kilchoman Church. A recent survey of Black Guillemots showed high densities around Islay, in particular the Rhinns and The Oa.

An Islay speciality is the Chough. Sadly, more than one guide to good birding sites claims that The Oa is the best place to see Choughs. This is not so and many a birder has been badly misled by such information. The Choughs on The Oa mostly frequent the cliffs and can be very difficult to find. In western Islay, on the Rhinns peninsula, on the other hand, Choughs nest in old buildings, sometimes, as on the RSPB's Reserve, near the road whence they can be watched without disturbing them. The two major dune areas of the Rhinns, at Machir Bay and Ardnave, are also excellent places to see Choughs, feeding in the short turf and seeking grubs from the many cowpats. Ardnave Loch is well worth a good look. It is one of the most fertile on the island and commonly holds a dozen or more species of wildfowl. In spring 1991, American Green-winged Teal and Ring-necked Duck were present together!

Forestry

The many derelict buildings scattered about the island mark where small holdings have been amalgamated into larger farms. They offer excellent nesting sites not only for Choughs but also for at least 12 pairs of Barn Owls. Tawny Owls frequent the larger woodlands, while Short-eared Owls can be seen hunting over the moorland and, increasingly, the young forestry plantations.

Some older forestry, in the centre of the island, has attracted nesting Crossbills in recent years, as well as Siskins. The younger plantations are still nice and open and provide excellent hunting grounds for that elegant raptor, the Hen Harrier. Among the other birds of prey breeding on the isand are a few pairs of Golden Eagles, several pairs of Peregrine, and small numbers of Merlin, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. Buzzards are widespread and increasing.

It is rare not to see several raptors in a day and at least one group of birders I took round last year should still remember the magic of five Golden Eagles, a Peregrine and a Hen Harrier all in view at once, with the other four species also seen during the visit.

For some, birding is all about rarities. Islay gets it share but they are merely the icing on an amazingly rich cake. Islay holds at least 100-110 species of birds throughout the year, with peaks of over 120 during the spring and autumn migration periods, in April and October. About 105 species breed each year with a few others perhaps doing so occasionally. Among the latter probably doing so in recent years have been Dotterel and Ring Ouzel, both on the same stony hill.

The island is a little far west and north for some species, which can confuse visitors who report, say, a Magpie and then wonder why we residents get excited about this rare vagrant! Other species which may not rate a second glance by a visitor from the mainland, but which are rare here, include Willow Tit (and indeed Marsh), woodpeckers, Pied Flycatcher and several more.

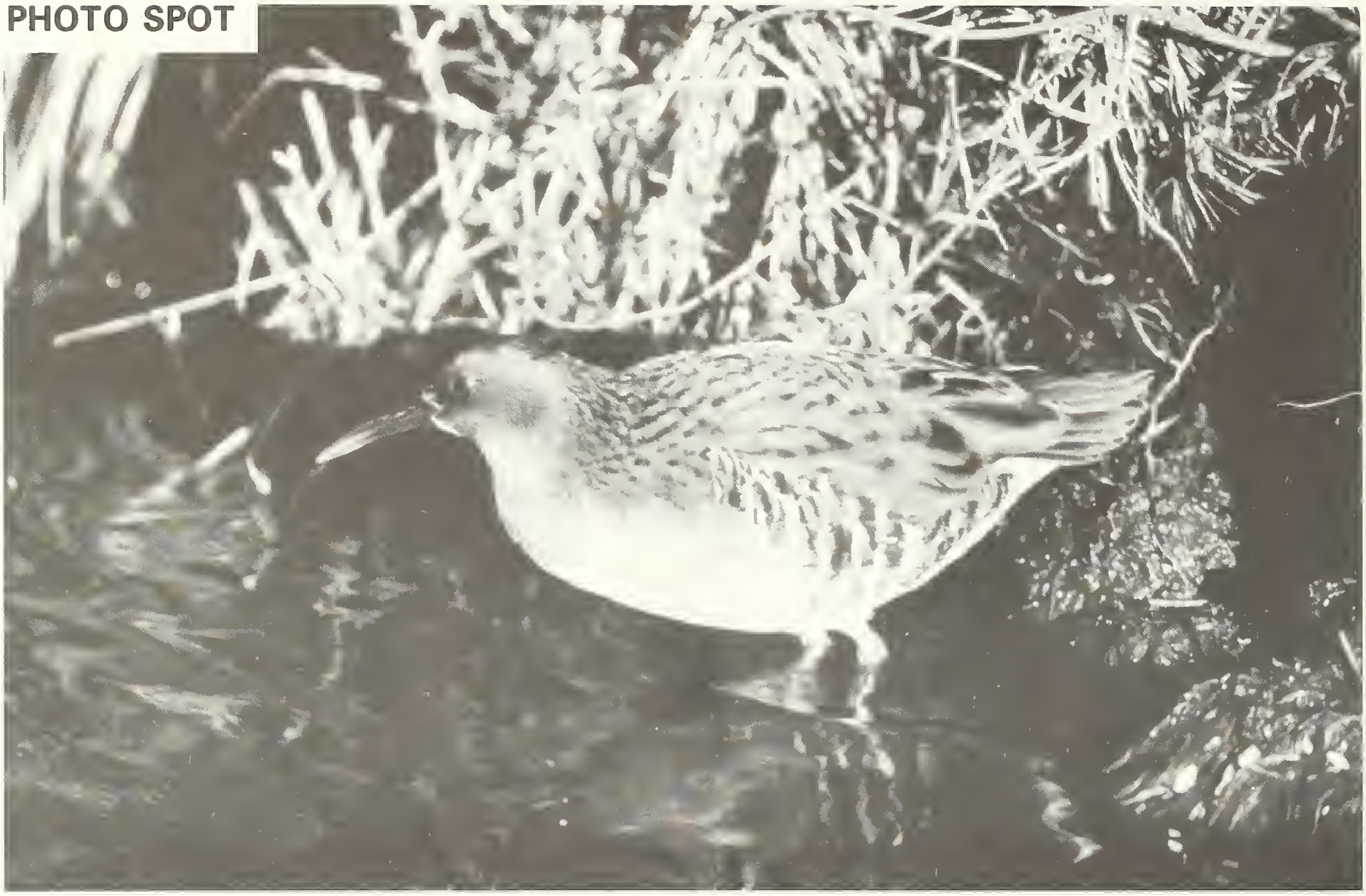
I produce an annual bird report (including other fauna and flora) for the Islay Natural History Trust and rely heavily on observations by visitors, as resident birders are few in number. There is no poor time for birdwatching on Islay, with geese and winter ducks present for seven months of the year, migration taking place in at lest four or five, and an extended breeding season from the laying by Ravens in February to the fledging of Hen Harriers in July.

The Tourist Office in Bowmore has information on accommodation. Many SOC members have stayed on the Islay Field Centre. This is now closed ahead of a re-opening late in 1992 in new premises which will incorporate a 42-bed Grade 1 Youth Hostel. The Field Centre will still have its reference library and record files, together with a large public display area, lecture room and laboratory. We look foward to welcoming many old friends and lots of new ones. There is just one request. Please drive carefully on the island. Locals drive without thought for a birder's car stopped just round the next bend and can get rightly peeved. I should know – I drive like a local but still stop like a birder!

Malcolm Ogilvie

Chough *M B Withers*
An Islay speciality

PHOTO SPOT



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SNH News

In April, shortly after this issue reaches you, the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland (NCCS) and the Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) will merge into the new body of Scottish National Heritage (SNH). While fears have been publicly expressed about the future of the new body, which it has been suggested may not be adequately funded, we must whole-heartedly applaud some of the appointments to the new body. Chris Smout, a Professor at St Andrews University, has been appointed Deputy Chairman, and former RSPB Regional Officer Roy Dennis, and the well known Professor from Aberdeen University George Dunnett have been appointed members of the board.

Our warmest congratulations to all these SOC stalwarts.

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Recent reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to ***Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,*** *at the end of March, June, September and December. The period October to December is covered here.*

This was a good period with yet another **Waxwing** invasion. High numbers of **Shore Larks**, and a good scattering of rarities were amongst the highlights.

The October/November period was typically very exciting, especially mid October, on the East coast and in the Northern Isles. Early November produced perhaps the two best birds with a well watched **Chimney Swift** at St. Andrews 8th-10th and a brief appearance of a **Little Swift** on Fair Isle on 1st, both potentially second records for Scotland. Behind these two was an impressive line up of rarities with a **Tennessee Warbler** at Wick 6th Oct, the 4th record for Scotland, a **Red-eyed Vireo** in East Lothian 13th-14th Oct, the 3rd record for Scotland, 3 **Pine Buntings**, all in Orkney, a **Great Snipe**, **Citrine Wagtail** and **Isabelline Shrike** all on North Ronaldsay, 3 **Pied Wheatears**, 2 in Shetland, 1 in East Lothian, 2 **Lanceolated Warblers**, predictably both on Fair Isle, also a **Desert Wheatear** there and 5 **Radde's Warblers**, from Shetland, Aberdeen, Angus and Fife.

After last year's mini-invasion of **Olive-backed Pipits** 7 were reported this year all in Orkney and Shetland, with 9 **Little Buntings**, 2 Ortolan Buntings, 1 **Rustic Bunting**, on North Ronaldsay, 9 **Short-toed Larks**, 1 of which on Fair Isle was killed by a **Great Grey Shrike**, 2 **Red-throated Pipits**, 2 **Arctic Redpolls**, 7 **Siberian Stonechats**, 2 **Pallas' Warblers** and 4 **Rose-coloured Starlings**. At least 35 **Yellow-browed Warblers**, including 1 showing characteristics of the race *humei* near Arbroath, c20 **Black Redstarts**, 11 **Great Grey Shrikes**, 11 **Richard's Pipits**, 7 **Red-breasted Flycatchers**, 6 **Hoopoes**, 6 **Common Rosefinches**, including a late 1 on Fair Isle on 30th Nov., 3 **Bluethroats**, 2 **Nightingales**, 4 **Barred Warblers**, 1 **Marsh Warbler** on Shetland, and 20 **Shore Larks** there, as well as up to 13 which winter at Tyninghame, East Lothian.

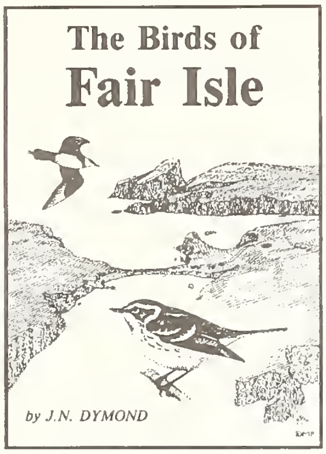
Elsewhere in the Oct./Nov. period a **Pied-billed Grebe** was on Loch Iubhair, Perthshire 15th Oct. and a **Great Shearwater** off the Summer Isles, Ross-shire 16th Oct. A High count of 48 **Leach's Petrels** was off Uisaed Point, Kintyre on 17th Oct. Also in Argyll a **Little Egret** was at Lochgilphead throughout Oct. The central Scotland **Bean Goose** flock, numbering about 150 birds was seen frequently in the Fannyside area near Cumbernauld. Only 2 **Snow Geese** were reported at Caerlaverock on 1st Oct. and at Hule Moss, Berwickshire. Caerlaverock also held a first-winter **Red-breasted Goose**, potentially a first for Scotland, which was present throughout the winter. A drake **Red-crested Pochard** was at Lochore, Fife 18th Oct. whilst 2 drake **Ring-necked Ducks** were in Ayrshire and on Speyside the latter present throughout the winter. A **King Eider** was at Lerwick, Shetland in early Oct. whilst a Drake returned to the Ythan Estuary at the end of the month. Up to 3 **Surf Scoters** were in Lunan Bay, Angus, with 2 in the Sound of Taransay off Harris. 2 **Rough-legged Buzzards** were on South Uist in Oct whilst in early Nov. a white-phase **Gyrfalcon** flew into a window at Port Charlotte on Islay, was picked up and released but was found dead the following week. Also on a sad note the **Baillon's Crake** on Fair Isle from Sept. died overnight on the 1st Oct.

5 **American Golden Plovers** were on North Ronaldsay and South Mainland Shetland and amazingly 1 of the Ronaldsay birds was re-trapped in Dec. after about 1 month's absence. A **White-rumped Sandpiper** was on South Uist 1st-3rd Oct. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** on Fair Isle 1st Oct. a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** on South Ronaldsay from 5th Oct, a **Spotted Sandpiper** at Balgray Reservoir, Renfrewshire till 1st Oct, a **Wilson's Phalarope** at Caerlaverock 3rd Oct and up to 33 **Grey Phalaropes** including c24 between Benbecula and South Uist on 1st Oct were recorded. **Pomarine Skuas** were recorded in small numbers until the first week in Nov. 26 at Uisaed Point, Kintyre on 17th Oct and 23 on Barns Ness, East Lothian on 18th Oct. were the biggest counts. After the unprecedented numbers of **Long-tailed Skuas** in Sept, 5 were reported in early Oct. – singles off Fair Isle and Uisaed Point and 3 off South Uist. An adult **Ring-billed Gull** was on North Uist 12th Oct., and a **White-winged Black Tern** at St. John's Loch, Caithness 15th Oct. 4 **Sabine's Gulls** were reported in Oct., singles off Uisaed Point, Stronsay, St. Kilda and Hound Point with **Little Auks** present in small numbers in late Oct. including 24 off Scurdie Ness, Angus on 20th and 70 on 22nd, 90 on 23rd and 64 on 20th off Fair Isle.

As expected Nov/Dec. was quieter though yet another **Waxwing** invasion occurred from mid November involving at least 850 birds. Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Pitlochry held the largest flocks. A colour ringing programme was again carried out in Aberdeen with over 100 birds fitted with a 3 ring colour combination on the left leg. In Nov. single **White-billed Divers** were in Bluemull Sound, Shetland and off South Uist. 4 **Bitterns** were reported: 2 together at Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh and singles at Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire and Loch Ken, Kirkcudbrightshire. A **Night Heron** at Loch Leven, Kinross-shire, though unringed, did not convince all observers that its origin was not from the free-flying Edinburgh Zoo colony. A **Little Egret** was in the Caerlaverock area from 24th Nov. Perhaps up to 6 **American Wigeons** were recorded with sightings at Loch Ussie Ross-shire, Lochore and Burntisland Fife, at Vane Farm, Montrose Basin and Gladhouse Reservoir Midlothian. 4 **Green-winged Teals** were reported at Loch of Lintrathen Angus, Scatness Pool Shetland, Loch Bee South Uist and near Inverness. A drake **Red-crested Pochard** was on Loch of Harray Orkney in Dec. whilst the female **Ring-necked Duck** returned to Auchenreoch Loch Kirkcudbrightshire in Dec. choosing the company of a **Scaup** rather than the **Lesser Scaup** of last year. A **King Eider** off Edinburgh is only the 3rd Lothian record, whilst a **Black Scoter** was off Dornoch Sutherland 11th Dec. and 2 **Surf Scoters** in Largo Bay Fife.

A **Little Stint** was still present at Tyninghame into early Dec. South Uist had both **Laughing** and **Franklin's Gulls** in Nov. and Dec. whilst a **Bonaparte's Gull** was reported from Balgray Reservoir Renfrewshire 4th Dec. and an adult **Mediterranean Gull** was at Cardross Dunbartonshire. The regular adult **Ring-billed Gull** returned to Stromness harbour Orkney. A first-winter **Ivory Gull** was picked up with only 1 wing near Fraserburgh on 28th Dec. A **Woodlark** was on Fair Isle on 19th Nov. whilst late **Swallows** were on Fair Isle 30th Nov. and in Ayrshire on 1st Dec. A **Whinchat** was present at Tyninghame into Dec. also taking advantage of the mild weather.

Angus Murray



The Birds of
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Published January 1992

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Monitoring Seabird Populations in the Firth of Forth 1991

The Lothian Ringing Group made two visits to Craigleith on 15th and 29th June and three visits to Inchkeith on 6th and 13th July and 3rd August.

There appeared to be a continuing decline in nesting Fulmars on Inchkeith. It will be interesting to see whether this trend reverses now that the Allandale Trust has removed its animals from the island. Cormorants on Craigleith appeared to have another successful season. Close examination of the colony was impractical due to large chicks and treacherous conditions underfoot during our visit. On Inchkeith Kittiwakes had a successful season with large numbers of chicks hatching.

The site of the largest coastal tern colony in East Lothian was visited but only a few pairs of Common Terns were present.

Lack of time and a regular boat service to Craigleith prevented us reinstating the Puffin census plots.

The following seabirds were ringed during our visits:

	Full Grown	Pulli	Total
Fulmar	2	99	101
Cormorant	0	60	60
Shag	40	205	245
Herring Gull	0	11	11
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	2	3
Greater Black-backed Gull	0	2	2
Kittiwake	15	258	273
Puffin	65	116	181
Razorbill	1	18	19
Guillemot	1	11	12
	124	783	904

A considerable number of birds were controlled (retrapped from previous years) and a significant number of birds ringed in previous years have been recovered in 1991.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the SOC. Ian Bainbridge and Jim Stevenson of the RSPB and Kathleen Allan of the Allandale Trust helped with boats to the islands.

Lothian Ringing Group

Shooting of Barnacle Geese

One of the best-known groups of migratory birds, the Svalbard breeding population of Barnacle Geese, has become a target for illegal shooting on its British wintering ground in the Solway Firth.

All the 17,000 or so Svalbard birds, many of which are ringed, spend the winter in and around the Solway Firth, which is a large estuary on the west coast dividing Scotland and England.

The geese have a safe refuge within the confines of the Caerlaverock nature reserve, run by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. However, now there are apparently increasing reports of birds being shot on the sand banks on either side of the reserve. As many as 600 Barnacle Geese have reportedly been illegally killed in recent winters, and the Caerlaverock warden is concerned that his staff are now stretched too thinly to protect the geese by patrolling ground outside the reserve boundaries.

Oystercatcher *Wm S Paton*
Members are urged to look out for colour-dyed Oystercatchers from N Ireland

Colour-marked Oystercatchers

As part of a study carried out by the North Down Ringing Group led by Jack Sheldon, on behalf of the Countryside and Wildlife Branch, Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), a number of Oystercatchers have been colour dyed. This is part of a study into the feeding behaviour of Oystercatchers on the mudflats of Belfast Lough.

422 Oystercatchers were caught, ringed and colour dyed **YELLOW** on the under tail coverts (behind the legs, on the underside of the tail) and released on 7th September 1991. A further 26 birds were caught, ringed, and again dyed **YELLOW** on the breast and backwards to the legs on 8th September 1991.

It is known from past ringing recoveries that a number of Oystercatchers wintering on Belfast Lough breed in the Western Isles, Highland, Shetland and also in the Faroes and Iceland.

Sightings of previous colour dyed Oystercatchers have come from the Inverness area of Scotland, Co Cork Republic of Ireland, Morecambe Bay and Cumbria.

Any sightings of colour dyed Oystercatchers please send to **Ian Forsyth, 24 Malone Park, Belfast BT9 6NJ (Tel 0232 665534).** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Ian Forsyth

Ailsa Craig and its Rats

We have mentioned before (SBN 22) efforts to eradicate the rats on Ailsa Craig, an operation in which the leading part has been played by Bernie Zonfrillo and to the costs of which the Club has contributed through the Surveys and Research Committee.

Three tonnes of Warfarin were airlifted last spring by a helicopter from the appropriately named HMS Gannet and distributed over the island. Bernie, who subsequently spent much of the summer at his cottage on the island, is cautiously optimistic about the results, as he has seen neither rats nor any evidence of their survival since the poisoning.

He warns however that, if only one pair were left, numbers would soon boom again and burrow-nesting birds would not be able to return. He therefore hopes that it will be possible to carry out a secondary baiting this year, which should make quite sure that the island is rat-free, and that the solitary Puffin which appeared there last year will be replaced by the thousands which used to throng the rock. If so, this may well be the first time ever that a successful campaign has been waged against a problem which occurs on bird islands world-wide; Bernie and his colleagues' efforts are thus of international significance.

Reviews

***The Birds of Scotland** by Emilio Dicerbo; Lochar 1991. 192pp 100 colour plates £19.99.*

The production/printing of the book is of a very high standard, and does not seem over priced considering the number of colour plates included.

The book is very much aimed at the pre fledging stage of development, or summer visitor. The contents are of interest both in the choice of photos and in the text. When a book is aimed as an introduction it is essential to choose photos/illustrations that are relevant. A photo of Redwings eating haws in a bush would have been of far more use than of one sitting tight on a nest, similarly Goosanders (both sexes) on water would have been far more useful than a female sitting in a nest chamber in a hollow tree. There are other examples.

As more than one photographer contributed to the book it would have been good to see the credits for the photos either on the page or listed within the book. It was obvious by the very high standard of most of the photographs a large amount of effort was involved and the photographers should have been given full credits.

Before going into the species accounts the book touches briefly on the Scottish situation in terms of habitats and threats. The comment on moorland managed for Grouse will cause a few deep intakes of breath, eg. "the odd predator pays the price". Along with the rest of the U.K. Scotland has an awful lot of "odd" Hen Harriers, Peregrines etc. (things have now started to improve at last).

The section on species was adequate in most areas with only a few errors. A useful addition within the species section was the inclusion of two general lists on where birds could be seen. The first of these gave brief details of wildfowl wintering areas. This was followed by a list of Scottish woodlands. Both of these lists included some of the species one could expect to see. Ideally this should have been followed up by a list of references to other books on Scottish birds and sites to see them. This would have made a useful addition towards the back of the book, along with clubs/societies involved in conservation/ornithology in a Scottish context.

In order to aid species identification it was pleasing to see the ducks compared to the familiar Mallard in size. However the system broke down on numerous occasions after that, by assuming the reader was familiar with one species then using it for comparison, eg. Capercaillie larger than Black Grouse, Dunlin smaller than Ringed Plover. A much better plan would have been to use a few familiar species eg. House Sparrow, Blackbird, Feral Pigeon, Mallard, Pheasant and Mute Swan, and compared all the rest as larger or smaller than the appropriate species.

The text had many personal accounts of species included in the species section. The book may sell well due to its high standard of production and colour plates. However it is unlikely to be on a serious ornithologist's bookshelf along side many other bird books.

Ian Langford

A Further Note on Alerstam's "Bird Migration"

I should like to add some comments to Norman Elkins' review, agreeing with his opinion that it is an exceptionally good read and that it is difficult to imagine anyone failing to deepen their knowledge of bird migration. There is one major error in the book when it is said that northern migrants to the tropics do not winter in rain forest: it has been known for many years that migrants form a regular and sizeable part of the forest community in Malaysia, whilst more recently the same has been found for at least some Nearctic rainforests; the African rain forests have turned out to be an exception, not the rule.

I am concerned that Alerstam's concentration on Scandinavian and Mediterranean studies gives a poor impression of the situation in Europe. It underplays the vast movement of all classes of migrant out of central and eastern Europe into SW France and Iberia and fails to mention the dramatic rise of the French migration projects in the Pyrenees which form the best coordinated set of studies in Europe. These projects are, unlike most bird observatories, very closely linked to conservation issues which do not feature conspicuously in Alerstam's material – in the index "trapping" refers only to bird ringing and "shooting" is absent, which must seem odd to any Italian birdwatchers. There is in general a lack of systematic interest in the human context of bird migration.

Since for many years the pages of British Birds seemed to be largely covered in weather maps it is strange that there is no mention of Williamson in the bibliography, and that consideration of drift is largely theoretical or, as far as passerine night migrants are concerned, limited to long distance vagrancy. Thus there is no general conclusion on the nature of migration over the North Sea – is it such a backwater?, or is drift relevant to explaining falls of migrants on the coast but of signally little importance for the main flow of migration? Maybe we should be told.

And maybe Cambridge University Press should be told to start selling books at prices that people can afford; Alerstam's work is far too good to be restricted to a narrow audience.

C.J. Henty

American Robin S M D Alexander
An American migrant which occasionally turns up on the wrong side of the Atlantic

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Alien Weed

An alien weed from Canada classed as an environmental pest is being blamed for the deaths of a large number of swans in Orkney and Loch Harry.

Recently a number of corpses of Mute Swans have been found around Loch Harry; this follows the finding of 130 corpses in July depleting the resident population to about 350 birds.

Post-mortems carried out by the Institute of Zoology in London have not revealed any signs of disease, although the birds had been in poor condition and probably died as a result of starvation, the sudden decline in the Canadian pond weed being the main cause.

The pond weed is only beneficial to grazing birds, the numbers of diving ducks having decreased due to the extensive cover of the weed. Fears had been expressed by anglers in the past that the weed would be so prolific that it would de-oxygenate the loch.

The unexplained appearance of the weed about five years ago has been a major attraction to wildfowl with wintering numbers around 15000 including up to 1000 Whooper Swans between Loch Harry and the nearby Loch of Stenness.

Eric Meek, the RSPB Conservation Officer in Orkney, stated that the benefit was likely to only be short term as the pond weed goes through cycles of boom and bust. At the moment we are into a bust phase and there is just not enough food for the birds.

South-east Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas

This project to locate and map all breeding birds in Lothian and Borders enters its fifth and possibly final year of fieldwork this spring. If you would like to contribute to this important survey work, then please contact one of the two organisers noted below. We are particularly keen to involve people who could visit more remote areas, but we would also like all SOC members who live in Lothian and Borders to contribute by simply recording breeding birds in their immediate home area. This may be your last chance to join in!

Contact: Mark Holling (Organiser for Lothian), Burnfoot Cottage, Symington Mains, Stow, Galashiels TD1 2SU Tel: 057 86 239 or Ray Murray (Organiser for Borders), 4 Bellfield Crescent, Eddleston, Peebles EH45 8RQ Tel: 072 13 677.

Mark Holling

Urban Bitterns

Duddingston Loch in Edinburgh has in recent years been the chosen wintering site for a Bittern. This year two separate and distinctive birds – one is appreciably smaller than the other – have been in residence for at least part of the winter. They are probably from the Scandinavian breeding population; wherever they have come from, they are welcome additions to the capital's avifauna.

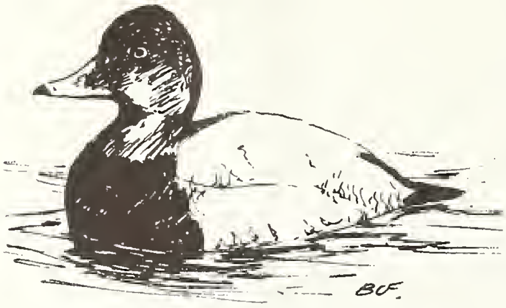
'Extinct' Madagascar Pochard

The Madagascar Pochard which was thought to be extinct for more than 20 years has recently been found alive on an island in the Indian Ocean.

Experts still fear that the male bird, which was caught in a fishing net on Aloatra Lake in north-east Madagascar, may have been the last of its kind in the world.

The surviving duck is being cared for by a French zoologist in co-operation with the Worldwide Fund for Nature. The duck is one of three wildfowl species in Madagascar which are classified by the WWT as severely threatened species.

The trust in conjunction with the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust hopes to investigate Madagascan wetlands and if necessary establish a captive breeding programme for endangered species.



Pochard *Bruce Forrester*
A familiar bird – unlike its surviving relative in Madagascar

Oil Spill in Cromarty Firth

The NCCS and the Cromarty Firth Port Authority have called for continued vigilance from industrial operators in the Firth following a minor diesel oil spill from an oil rig in January; this followed a more serious incident last October when 15,000 gallons of diesel leaked into the Firth following a collision between a supply boat and an oil rig.

The estuary is of international importance to wildlife with large numbers of geese, ducks and waders wintering in the Firth, not to mention the rare Bottlenose Dolphin population, Porpoises and Common Seals which are also present in the Firth.

It is the hope of the NCCS and the Port Authority that closer attention will be paid to safety procedures and improved alertness during fuelling operations by all marine-based business in the Firth.

Until last October's incident the area had a fairly good record of protecting the marine environment, and it cannot be stressed enough that the highest standards of working practices are required from industry to maintain these standards. The Firth must retain its reputation as an area where industry and wildlife can satisfactorily co-exist side by side.

Not so wildlife on Inchkeith

Inchkeith Island in the Firth of Forth could well be handed back to the birds in the near future, if the plan to remove the five remaining goats is completed satisfactorily.

Snuffles, Gem, Tiffany, Timothy and Chocolate Drop were left behind on Inchkeith about two months ago, when Kathleen Allan of the Allandale Animal Sanctuary moved off the island to a new home in Shotts, Lanarkshire. At the time she was unable to capture the goats and was forced to abandon them. However, evidence of shooting by uninvited guests has led to a new mission to capture the goats.

The Spirit of Fife ferry and motor launch transported 42 veterinary students from Edinburgh University to the island in an unsuccessful attempt to capture the goats. Unfortunately the goats did not appreciate this well meaning intrusion and made off in all directions. Eventually Snuffles was caught, but two of the other four took drastic measures and leapt into the sea; after a short swim the elusive creatures became precariously stuck on an inaccessible ledge. As the tide rose the RNLI, summoned to assist, managed to get the two goats back on dry land. Both of which then managed to escape yet again.

A spokesman for the Allandale Trust has said a further attempt will be made to rescue the goats, and meanwhile Snuffles is settling in at his new home in Shotts.

Wilf Nelson Rum Bursary

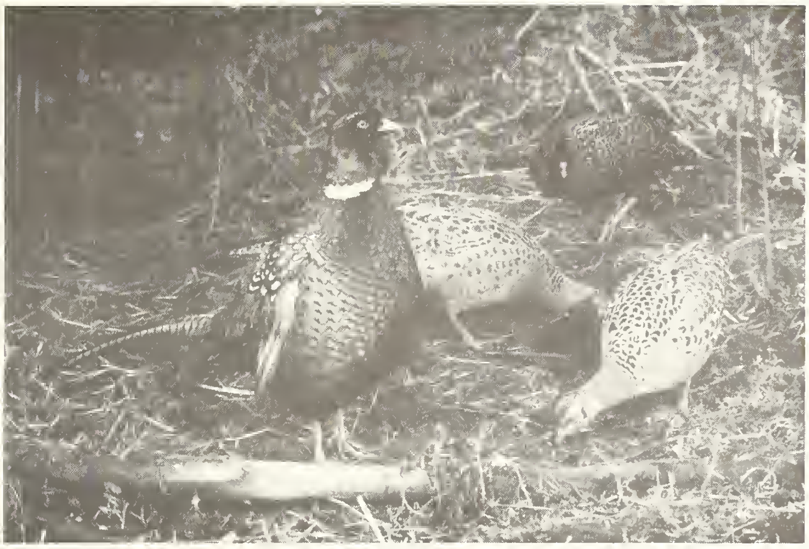
On 14th September 1989 Wilf Nelson suffered a fatal fall while carrying out routine survey work as Warden for the Nature Conservancy Council on the Island of Rum National Nature Reserve.

Wilf had already contributed a great deal to nature conservation, both on Rum and elsewhere, in his short career, and such was the widespread feeling of loss amongst his many friends and colleagues that a memorial fund was established. This fund, which is still open for donations, now stands at around £6000 and with the support of Wilf's widow, Rosemary, it was decided to establish a Bursary which will be used to support small research/survey projects centred on Rum.

Applications for financial support are therefore invited for individual projects to be carried out during 1992. Preference will be given to studies on the natural environment of Rum, particularly its wildlife, but consideration will also be given to projects dealing with conservation management, including education and interpretation. It seems likely that around £500/£600 will be available for dispensing during 1992.

A brief summary of the project proposal and estimated costs should be sent initially to the Chief Warden, Rum and should arrive by 31st March 1992.

Further enquiries to **Chief Warden, Rum (0687 2026)** during normal office hours.



Pheasants *Bill Middleton*
This photograph won second prize in the Annual Competition

Ringed Plover *David Hassell*
The third place winner

Tom Irving

Tom Irving, of Langholm, Dumfriesshire, died on 21st February 1991. He was a long-standing member of the SOC, and a superb bird photographer. He particularly gave his attention to the Barn Owls of eastern Dumfriesshire, knowing many of them almost personally – where they were hatched, which birds were their parents and where they come from and moved to. There cannot be a barn, hayshed or ruined cottage in the Langholm area that he had not visited, and in many of them he had placed tea-chests and barrels that are now being used as nesting and roosting boxes.

Tom's 'Birdwatching Patch' was the Tarras Water, a beautiful Border burn which rises high on Roan Fell, runs down through deep pools and over rushing waterfalls, past little gravel beaches and under old stone bridges until it joins the River (Border) Esk. It passes between lawn-like sheep-grazed banks backed by natural deciduous woodlands of oak and alder, which give way to the famous grouse moors between Langholm and Newcastleton. Tom must have known every Dipper's bank, every Willow Warbler's thicket and every Treecreeper's crevice; he certainly knew where every Hen Harrier and Merlin held its territory, and where the best places were to sit to scan both the babbling river and the wide open hillsides.

Torquil and Margaret Johnson-Ferguson thought that it would be nice to perpetuate the memories that so many people have of Tom, by placing a seat dedicated to him, at one of his favourite birdwatching spots beside the Tarras. Tom's wife Ella was very happy with this idea; she chose a place that Tom loved, and which will be well used, being close to the single-track road just above Tarras Lodge. Buccleuch Estates have kindly given their permission, and Margaret Johnson-Ferguson has chosen a beautifully carved hardwood seat. A suitable plaque has been prepared, and it is intended to place it in position with a little ceremony, sometime in the early spring.

It is expected that the cost of Tom's seat and the Plaque will be around the £230 mark. Would anyone who would like to contribute to this, please contact Margaret Johnson-Ferguson at Solwaybank, Chapelknowe, Canonbie, Dumfriesshire, Tel. 03873 72240. If excess funds are collected, they will be gifted to Cancer Research in accordance with Ella's request.

Torquil Johnson-Ferguson

Herring Gull problem at Abbey

Herring Gulls with a taste for fish suppers and Chinese takeaways have now taken up residence in the historic Arbroath Abbey.

Over the last five years environmental health inspectors have removed between 2000 and 3000 eggs and destroyed many nests from roofs around the town centre in a bid to rid the residents and visitors to the town of unsuspecting swoops by these hungry gulls looking for easy pickings.

However, the gulls have found a safe refuge in the meantime in the confines of the historic Arbroath Abbey, which is the scene of the Declaration of Independence. As the Abbey's custodians are Historic Scotland the council do not have the powers to remove them. A spokesman for Historic Scotland said that they had tried to keep the gull population down, by putting up deterrent wires to try and stop the birds getting in, but they have now figured out a way of getting through. Talks may soon be held to see what can be done, before too much deterioration of the fragile fabric of the building is affected.

Next years Annual conference will be held at Aviemore on the weekend 30th October/1st November. Details with June mailing of SBN.

Herring Gull *B Zonfrillo*
On the look-out for Haddock and Chips??

SOC Notices

Thanks again to

Paul Speak, Bob & Betty Smith, Joan Wilcox, David Kelly, Tom & Alison Barclay, Keith Chapman, Calum Scott, Tom Gillies, Ken Mackenzie, Rosemary Davidson, Ray Murray, Vick Flanders, Bill & Hetty Harper, Sheila Horsburgh and Rosemary Walton for helping to pack the December issue of Scottish Bird News and Scottish Birds. Without all these helpers this task would be impossible and my sincere thanks goes to Peter Gordon for organising so many willing people.

200 Club

With increased membership we were able to give more prizes in November, including £100 for the first time. Winners in the last quarter of 1991 were: –

October: 1st £30 – D.C. Jardine, Hexham; 2nd £20 – A.G.S. Bryson, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – G.A. Bell, Edinburgh.

November: 1st £100 – D.L. Clugston, Glasgow; 2nd £50 – Lt. Cdr. E.F.B. Spragge, Ceres, Fife; 3rd £30 – Mr & Mrs D. Johnston, Troon; 4th £20 – Mrs M. Draper, Glasgow; 5th £10 – Miss J.E. Howie, St. John's Town of Dalry.

December: 1st £30 – G.G. Rennie, Carluke; 2nd £20 – Miss A. Macdonald, Dumfries; 3rd £10 – B. Etheridge, Avoch, Ross-shire.

At the end of May we reach the end of the 200 Club's third year. Readers of *SBN* will know how much we have been able to achieve with the refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace, and the SOC is most grateful for this very tangible help. During this time we will have given back some £1950 in prizes, and the same amount in helping the refurbishment. Renewal notices will be sent out shortly to existing members who do not pay by Bankers Order. We hope that you will renew your annual subscription (£12 due by 1 June), and we welcome any other SOC member who would like to join. Please either send me a cheque for £12 (payable to 'SOC 200 Club') or write and ask me for a Bankers Order form. I look forward to hearing from you at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. 089 682 2176).**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Regional Recorders

Donald Watson has decided to give up the recordership for Wigtownshire and the Stewartry, and the compiling of the annual bird report for Dumfries & Galloway. Paul Collin has kindly agreed to take over these tasks. Could contributors please note this change. **Paul Collin, Gairland, Old Edinburgh Road, Minnigaff, Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire DG8 6PL.**

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing, although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to *Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Munlochy, Ross-shire IV8 8ND*

Local Recorders

Dumfries & Galloway *(Nithsdale, Annandale & Eskdale)* – Ken Bruce, Mallaig, Wellington Street, Glencaple, Dumfries DG1 4RA.

Dumfries & Galloway *(Stewartry & Wigtown)* – Paul Collin, Gairland, Old Edinburgh Road, Minnigaff, Newton Stewart DG8 6PL.

Strathclyde *(Kyle & Carrick, Cumnock & Doon valley, Kilmarnock & Loudoun, Cunninghame)* – Angus Hogg, Kirklea, Crosshill, Maybole, Ayrshire KA19 7RJ.

Strathclyde *(Dumbarton, Clydebank, Bearsden & Milngavie, Stirling (Clyde drainage area), Inverclyde, Renfrew, Eastwood, City of Glasgow, Strathkelvin, Cumbernauld & Kilsyth, Monklands, Hamilton, Motherwell, East Kilbride, Clydesdale)* – Iain Gibson, 2 Fulton Crescent, Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire PA10 2EB.

Strathclyde *(Arran, Bute & Cumbraes)* – Bernard Zonfrillo, 28 Brodie Road, Glasgow G21 3SB.

Strathclyde *(Argyll & Bute, except Isle of Bute)* – Mike Madders, Gruinart, Bridgend, Isle of Islay PA44 7PS.

Borders *(Berwickshire, Ettrick & Lauderdale, Roxburgh, Tweeddale)* – Ray Murray, 4 Bellfield Crescent, Eddleston, Peebles EH45 8RQ.

Lothian *(East Lothian except Musselburgh lagoons)* – Peter Gordon, 4 Craigielaw, Longniddry, East Lothian EH32 0PY.

Lothian *(except as above, but including Musselburgh lagoons)* – Chris McGuigan, 10/9 Blair Street, Edinburgh EH1 1QR.

Central *(Clackmannan, Falkirk, Stirling)* – Dr Cliff Henty, 7 Coneyhill Road, Bridge of Allan, Stirlingshire FK9 4EL.

Fife *(Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, NE Fife)* – Dougie Dickson, 45 Hawthorn Terrace, Thornton, Fife KY1 4DZ.

Fife *(Isle of May)* – Ian Darling, West Acres, 597 Lanark Road West, Balerno, Edinburgh EH4 7BL.

Tayside *(Perth & Kinross)* – Wendy Mattingley, Cluny House, Aberfeldy, Perthshire PH15 2JT.

Tayside *(Angus, City of Dundee)* – Martin Scott, 33 John Street, Arbroath, Angus DD11 1BT.

Grampian *except Moray)* – Ken Shaw, 4 Headland Court, Newtonhill, Stonehaven, Kincardineshire AB3 2SF.

Grampian/Highland *(Moray, Nairn)* – Martin Cook, Rowanbrae, Clochan, Buckie, Banffshire AB5 2EQ.

Highland *(except Caithness & Sutherland)* – Roy Dennis, Inchdryne, Nethybridge, Inverness-shire APH25 3EF.

Highland *(Caithness)* – Eric Maughan, Burnside, Reay, Thurso, Caithness KW14 7RG.

Highland *(Sutherland)* – Tony Mainwood, 13 Ben Bhraggie Drive, Golspie, Sutherland KW10 6SX.

Western Isles *(Harris, Lewis)* – W A J Cunningham, 10 Barony Square, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis PA87 2TQ.

Western Isles *(Uists, Benbecula, Barra)* – Tim Dix, 2 Dreumasdal, South Uist PA81 5RT.

Orkney Chris Booth, 34 High Street, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1AZ.

Shetland *(except Fair Isle)* – Dave Suddaby, 92 Sandveien, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0RU.

Sales Items

SOC Sweatshirt Navy with pocket-size SOC logo. Small, Medium, Large and Ex Large.	£10.50
SOC Ties Polyester with repeat SOC motif. Navy, Maroon, Drk Green & Drk Brown.	£5.95
SOC Badge Enamelled metal lapel badge. New reduced price.	£2.00
SOC Car Sticker Plastic, self-adhesive SOC motif.	£ .75
SOC Fieldlist A pocket-sized checklist of all species regularly occurring in Scotland. New reduced price.	£ .50
SOC Checklist An annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. New reduced price.	£ 1.00

All prices include post and packing (except overseas – add £1.50) **SOC (Sales) 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).**

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

Adult	£12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25)	£5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18)	£18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family	£360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family	£10.00

Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 31 March for the June number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

Red Kites

As part of the NCC/RSPB re-introduction programme a further 20 red kites have been released in the Scottish highlands this summer. *Please notify RSPB Highland Office at Munlochy, Ross-shire immediately of any sightings by telephone if possible. Tel. 0463 81 496/222.*

Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC
Printed by Ritchie of Edinburgh, 163 Bonnington Road, Edinburgh EH6 5RE

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THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish
Bird News

JUNE 1992 No. 26
ISSN 0268-3200

Edited by Sylvia Laing,
Michael Murphy and
Kate Thompson

Raptor round up 1991

As in previous years this report summarises the work of Scotland's Raptor Study Groups in an attempt to provide an overall picture of their monitoring efforts during 1991. As ever the Groups' members have achieved a great deal working for the most part in their own time and at their own expense.

The effects of the atrocious weather in the spring and early summer took its toll with most species. Golden Eagles had a generally poor season with some notable exceptions at the western fringe of their range and most Merlin workers attributed poor performance in their study areas to the adverse weather conditions. Despite the weather, Peregrines continue to expand their population with several reports of alternative sites now occupied by second pairs. In the far north and west, however, there seems to be continued decline, a worrying trend, and in southern Scotland human interference with sites is at least as great a cause of failure as the climatic conditions and is a more consistent threat from year to year. More attention to Hen Harriers, still by far and away our most heavily persecuted raptor, is noticeable in the minutes of many Raptor Groups' meetings and this is reflected in several reports summarised here. In 1992, perhaps, we may have the first "100 chick year" to look forward to for Ospreys (it should have happened in 1991) and before long some Groups will hopefully be recording breeding Red Kites within their areas.

Golden Eagle at eyrie *Bob Lambie*

Golden Eagle

North-east Scotland RSG
(Robert Rae, Keith Brockie)

A better season that most of northern and central Scotland. Although the area had only a marginally better production of chicks per successful pair (a mean of 1.6) it had a higher number of chicks produced per pair attempting than other areas. The generally higher quality habitat in this area may give these birds some resilience against bad weather conditions, although failures at two north facing sites could have been caused by the bad weather. At least five sets of twins fledged.

Central Scotland RSG
(Dave Dick, Roger Broad)

Although the two successful pairs in this area produced three young the overall performance from the seven occupied sites was low with five pairs failing to rear young.

Tayside RSG
(Keith Brockie)

25 occupied sites were identified in 33 home ranges. From these fifteen chicks fledged from ten successful nests, a productivity of 1.5 per successful pair. This relatively high rate should be seen against a very poor performance in relation to the number of pairs attempting, repeating on a larger scale the pattern in Central. A higher success rate in the eastern part of the area was discernible in line with the overlying trend in Scottish eagles to be more productive in the east than in the west.

Argyll
(Roger Broad, Mike Gregory)

A generally good mean productivity rate (1.2 chicks per successful pair) masked a rather patchy season with a consistently high success rate from one area compensating for poor success in some other parts. An Islay adult was killed by power cables but soon replaced by an immature, and a chick on Mull, although raised to fledging age, was unable to fledge because of deformities to the wing joints.

Highland RSG
(Jeff Watson)

A literally averagely successful breeding season for Highland eagles. This is shown by a calculation of breeding success between 1981 and 1991 which gives a mean of 0.5 fledged young per pair. This exactly matches the figure for 1991 alone. These figures are based on data from North Sutherland, Wester Ross, Easter Ross and East Inverness and South Lochaber, a sample of about 50 pairs.

Western Isles RSG
(Tim Dix, Alison Rothwell)

A high productivity rate of 1.5 chicks per successful pair was recorded. Exceptionally, one site fledged three birds. Coverage, especially on Lewis and Harris, was lower than 1990 so that only 38 home ranges were examined as against 65 for 1990. Nevertheless, the total of sixteen young recorded fledging is four more than for 1990 from the same number (eleven) of successful pairs. Human interference continues to cause failures with eight pairs thought to have been affected this way in 1991.

Peregrine

Western Isles RSG
(Tim Dix, Alison Rothwell)

Only nine occupied sites were found out of the twenty checked. A productivity rate of 1.8 chicks per pair was recorded from the four pairs that were successful. Information on several sites was difficult to obtain due to inaccessibility.

Highland RSG
(Colin Crooke, Roy Dennis)

The 1991 work indicated a site occupancy rate of 75% in the east of the region but as little as 22% and not more than 30% in the west. Overall productivity was about average but the very worrying low site occupancy in the north and west may indicate a decline in the species in these areas in contrast with the general UK trend.

Argyll RSG
(Roger Broad)

A high level of coverage was achieved with only three known sites not visited. 69 sites were found occupied with a further eighteen to nineteen sites having at least one bird present. Eggs were laid at 56 sites and 27 pairs got young off with a further eight probably getting young off. A minimum of 43 young fledged. This represents a significantly higher level of occupancy than in 1990 but a similar productivity rate from successful pairs.

North-east Scotland RSG
(John Hardy, Keith Brockie)

The population continues to expand with 76 sites now occupied, although this is not a universal trait with four sites found to be abandoned. Human interference was significant, persecution being discovered or suspected at seven failed sites and disturbance probably responsible for the failure of two others.

Shetland
(Pete Ellis)

Although five single birds were recorded on territories Shetland achieved the dubious distinction of raising no peregrines at all in 1991, the only Scottish county to fail to do so.

Orkney
(Eric Meek)

A low level of site occupancy continues to characterise Orkney peregrines. Success levels in the sites that were occupied show a slight apparent improvement on 1990 but this assessment is difficult to make with confidence since the data are incomplete due to the difficulty in monitoring these birds.

Central Scotland RSG
(Patrick Stirling-Aird)

23 pairs raised at least 49 offspring, a productivity rate of 2.1 birds per successful pair. Five sites were seemingly unoccupied with only single birds recorded at a further four.

Tayside & Fife RSG
(Keith Brockie)

Overall productivity for the area, as in Central, was 2.1 young per successful pair. Gamekeeper persecution was suspected of being instrumental in at least eight failures with poor weather believed to have contributed to lack of success at at least eleven sites. On the positive side, one site routinely persecuted for the past ten years fledged three young and another site, where the young are usually taken, presumably for falconry, also got three chicks off for the first time in many years.

Peregrine with 2 chicks, notice full crop of right hand chick *Edmund Fellowes*

Peregrine

Home range/site	**L&H**	**NE**	**C**	**SW**	**SE**	**Arg**	**Hghl**	**Ork**	**Shet**	**Uist**	**Total**
Sites checked	95	47	119	107	35	101	273	35	5+	20	837+
Sites birds present	76	38	92	94	35	88	129	16	0	9	577
Sites laid	62+		48+	69	34	56	107-129	6-11	0		–
Sites hatched			39+	47				4-9	0		–
Sites fledged	39+	23	58	44	17	27-35	58-85	3-9	0	4	273-314
Tot. young fledged	74+	49+	119+	88+	37	43+	90+	6+	0	7	513+

Golden Eagle

	W.Isl	**Cent**	**Tay**	**Arg**	**Hghl**	**NE**	**Total**
Sites checked	38	9	33	73	112	21	286
Sites birds present	32	7	25	68		16	148+
Sites laid	19			43		13-14	–
Sites hatched				29			–
Sites fledged	11	2	10	26	51	8	108
Tot. young fledged	16	3	15	32	56	13+	135+

Merlin

	W. Isl	**Gram**	**Tay**	**SW**	**SE**	**Arg**	**Hghl**	**Ork**	**Shet**	**Total**
Sites checked	19		93	25	21+	7+	31+	48	62	306
Sites birds present	10	51	64	21	21	7	31	16	31	252
Sites laid			48-49	16	15	4	24	13	20	–
Sites hatched				9	11	4	20	9		–
Sites fledged	4	26	33	9	10	4	18	9	13	126
Tot. young fledged	9	71+	89+	35	30+	12	47	21-28	41	355-362+

Osprey

No. pairs known	**No. pairs laying**	**No. clutches hatched**	**No. successful broods**	**Tot. no. young fledged**
72	60	50	43	81

South-west Scotland RSG
(Dick Roxburgh)

A high level of coverage was achieved with 107 sites checked. Productivity, however, was generally low with only three four-chick broods amongst those fledged by the 44 successful pairs. Nest robberies continue in this area at worryingly high levels. Thirteen clutches or broods were taken or suspected of being taken. This includes a relay clutch from a pair whose first clutch had also been taken. The falcon from one site was found shot and buried nearby.

South-east Scotland RSG
(George Carse)

Expansion continues with the 35 occupied sites in this area representing an increase of three over the previous year. The 37 young fledged represents an average year for this area. This low productivity is only considered average because high levels of persecution and robbery are the norm here. Of the seventeen pairs that laid but failed to produce young only two failed naturally. Fifteen pairs were robbed of eggs or young or subjected to gamekeeper persecution.

Merlin

Western Isles RSG

(Tim Dix, Alison Rothwell)

A lower level of coverage on Lewis and Harris meant that only nineteen Western Isles sites were checked for 1991 as against 45 in 1990. From ten occupied territories only four pairs raised a total of nine young. Recorded productivity was down on 1990, although the sample size indicating this is rather small. Nevertheless this would be in line with Merlin performance for most of the rest of Scotland.

Tayside

(Wendy Mattingley, Bruce Anderson, Ron Downing)

More territories than ever before (93) were checked revealing 64 pairs. Success was down on 1990 however (when 47 occupied sites produced 95 young) with 64 occupied sites producing only 89 fledglings. It is hoped to increase the coverage further in 1992.

Grampian

(Graham Rebecca)

A generally bad year with some pairs deserting incomplete clutches. In the main Deeside study area occupancy levels were normal but breeding success was the worst since the study began in 1980 with only six out of fourteen pairs rearing young. A tree nest in a conifer plantation edge site was recorded for only the second time, about sixty kilometres away from the first one, found in 1987.

South-west Scotland RSG

(Dick Roxburgh)

35 young were produced from nine successful pairs. Occurrences of broken eggs and one incidence of soft-shelled eggs gave cause for concem. Poor weather appeared to be the main factor, however, in determining breeding success.

South-east Scotland RSG

(Alan Heavisides)

The Lammermuir sites, normally the most productive part of the area, had their lowest success levels in the seven years of the study. The bad weather caused most birds to be late, although one pair defied this trend and laid in the third week of April. In contrast, the Moorfoot sites had average levels of occupancy and productivity. Despite an increased effort to cover the Pentlands only one site (out of three occupied) was recorded reaching the laying stage and this failed after only one egg was produced.

Orkney

(Eric Meek)

An almost carbon copy repeat of 1990's season which was itself the best for over a decade. Seven of the original thirteen first clutches failed during incubation but three of these failed pairs achieved successful relays.

Shetland

(Pete Ellis)

Although the number of pairs on site was higher than 1990 (31 against 29) there were fewer successful pairs. It was noted that it was mainly the younger pairs that failed to breed and many of these appear to have arrived back in Shetland in poor condition. Although fewer in number the successful birds achieved a higher mean productivity rate than in the previous year (3.2 against 2.9 chicks per successful pair).

Highland RSG

(Brian Etheridge)

The cold wet weather in late May and June meant that this was another very poor year with fewer pairs located than 1990 and a mean productivity of only 2.6 young per successful pair, 2.0 per pair attempting to breed and 1.5 per occupied site (against 3.3, 2.3 and 1.6 respectively in 1990, itself a poor season).

Argyll

(Roger Broad)

Less data was available than in earlier years making comparisons difficult. Analysis is not easy in any case because of the relatively thin distribution of the species in this area generally. The mean productivity rate for the data available was three young per successful nest.

Cock Merlin incubating nest in deep heather

Arthur Gilpin

Buzzard

Highland RSG

53 pairs of buzzards were looked at in Caithness and Sutherland, Easter Ross, Nairn and Inverness, Skye and Lochaber. This sample clearly demonstrated the effects of the bad summer weather with mean overall productivity at only 1.64 young per attempting pair. In Easter Ross several nests were recorded with only one live chick.

Kestrel

Ayrshire

(Gordon Riddle)

This long-term study, begun in 1972, continues and is now the subject of a book. 33 occupied terriories were examined. Mild March weather encouraged an early start by some birds but the wet spell that followed meant that most pairs didn't lay until the third week of April. 22 pairs eventually laid an average of five eggs each. One bird laid eight eggs, the largest clutch ever recorded in the study and another female repeated a clutch of five after deserting her first five eggs. 77% of the eggs hatched giving a mean brood size of 3.9 but the wet June weather allowed only just over 75% of these to fledge (88% in 1990). Significantly, pairs in sheltered sites (nest boxes or buildings) were far more productive than birds using exposed sites.

Highland RSG

(Mick Canham)

Data were collected from 38 pairs, mostly from a Forestry Commission study of birds mainly using nestboxes. These were in Sutherland (eighteen), Easter Ross (eleven), Caithness (seven), Invemess (one) and Moray (one). From a mean clutch size of 5.6 eggs 4.53 young were produced per laying pair, an averagely successful year.

Osprey

(Roy Dennis)

The number of pairs continues to rise with seventy two located in 1991. These had the potential to produce a hundred chicks for the first time in two centuries. Breeding success, however, was down on last year due to cold wet weather at hatching time and difficult fishing conditions in June. This caused seven pairs to lose young and meant that an unusually high proportion of pairs (thirteen out of forty three) raised only one chick. Five pairs fell victim to egg collectors with only one of these managing to re-lay.

Hen Harrier

Tayside RSG

(Bruce Anderson)

Out of 59 occupied sites only nineteen were successful, rearing 76 young of which at least 72 fledged. This represents a mean productivity of 3.8 birds per pair. 74 chicks were wing-tagged.

Highland RSG

(Brian Etheridge)

Of 34 clutches laid in the sites checked, 21 produced 60 young. This gives a mean productivity of 2.9 per successful nest and 1.8 per laying female.

South-west Scotland RSG

(Richard Gladwell)

In the study area only eight out of 28 nests were successful, producing 30 young to fledging. With some notable exceptions a high level of persecution continues. 36 chicks were wing-tagged and three 1990 wing-tagged females returned to the area, two of them within 1.5 kilometres of their natal site.

Orkney

(Eric Meek)

47 nests were located, 25 of which failed during incubation and five after hatching. The remaining seventeen nests produce 44 young, at least to ringing age.

Keith Morton, RSPB

Scottish ringers' conference 1992

Once again the faithful made their way to the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar to celebrate the 17th annual Scottish Ringers' Conference hosted by the Highland Ringing Group, during the weekend 22nd-24th of November.

As usual the proceedings started on Friday evening with a slide show; this, combined with an opportunity to sample the odd tincture from the cellars of our host hotel, got the weekend away to a very good start.

After registration on Saturday morning it was straight into the business, with an excellent talk on the Red Kite re-introduction programme given by Roy Dennis. Raptors were again the subject of the second talk when Mick Canham gave an interesting dissertation on Kestrel nestboxes in Highland upland forest areas.

After a break for mid-morning coffee, Stuart Rae gave a very interesting talk combined with some of his early results from the ongoing study on Ptarmigan within the Eastern highlands. It would appear that the plethora of steelwork and cables required by the ski companies to carry out their operations pose a real obstacle to the Ptarmigan, with a number of birds being found dead under ski-tow wires.

Red-Breasted Mergansers were next on the agenda, with Brian Little giving us all a very enjoyable and animated talk regarding his exploits in the alluvial mud in and around the environs of Lindisfarne catching and ringing these fascinating but apparently elusive birds.

To complete the morning the BTO staff headed this time by Richard Howard, President of the BTO, and such notaries as Chris Mead reinforced by other well known members of the BTO staff subjected themselves to questions from the gathered throng. What transpired was a very productive and quiet affair ending with a statement from the floor to the effect that it was, in general, appreciated by all present how well the move to Thetford had been carried out, with only minimal impact to the members of the Trust.

The early part of Saturday afternoon was given over to private excursions around Braemar to view the local avifauna. Crossbills, Snow Buntings, Capercaillies and Ptarmigan were all observed. All these species were overshadowed (literally) by the appearance of a Scottish-bred White Tailed Eagle observed earlier by everyone, no doubt, keeping an expert eye on the proceedings from above the hotel.

Some of the Scottish ringers twitching the Sea Eagle at Braemar November 1991
David Jardine

Wing-tagged Sea Eagle *John Love*

Saturday's programme continued with two talks on nestbox studies, the first given by Alan Barclay on his work with Sandra Hacker providing some interesting facts on Tree Sparrows within an urban environment. The second talk by Bill Taylor gave an insight into the life of Crested Tits within the Culbin Forest.

Ron Summers than transported us all off to the frozen wastelands of Siberia where he spent an interesting few weeks living in a prefabricated yurt on the tundra surviving on a diet of tinned Semolina. Ron gave us all a well explained and illustrated talk as to the importance of the lemming to predators and thus to wader pullus productivity within the arctic tundra region.

As the formal part of Saturday's proceedings drew to a close with dinner in the hotel, the unofficial and some would say more popular programme commenced; a more relaxed informal mood was prevalent giving all present an opportunity to chat to friends and acquaintances from other parts of the country.

Sunday morning (O dear! it must have been something I ate, a bad peanut perhaps!) began with Ann Brenchley giving the walking wounded a very interesting account of the work of the A ROCHA Trust near Faro in southern Portugal where British ringers are welcomed with open arms, there being a shortage of licensed ringers to carry out both migrating and resident bird work at the observatory.

Bob Swann was then the first of two members of the host ringing group to give informative talks, his being on the importance and relevance of work carried out by the Highland Ringing group on wader population monitoring in and around the Moray Firth. The second was given by Brian Etheridge, the Highland Group Chairman, on his ongoing involvement with the wing-tagging programme of the much persecuted Hen Harrier in Scotland.

Coffee was followed by a very important talk, close to my own heart, by Mick Marquiss on the Grampian Ringing Group. In a very candid and revealing exposé of the group's activities he highlighted the very real plight of the group's ageing and infirm population; the lack of young blood joining the ranks of this small sometimes misunderstood group of avian fanatics could pose a threat to its future.

The last talk was given by Bernie Zonfrillo, the topic avian lice. These little creatures are evidently very useful as an aid to genetic studies with particular emphasis on those found on Procellariidae. It left us all itching to know more about this very interesting and virtually unknown topic.

Once again a very highly successful Conference, all thanks to our hosts the Highland Ringing Group for yet another triumph.

No doubt the faithful will wend their way to Braemar to celebrate this unique and very enjoyable gathering again this year where the Grampian Ringing Group will attempt to make it an even better Scottish Ringing Conference.

Mike Kimber

Birds and Hedges; How you can help

SOC members will not need reminding how important hedges are to the breeding success of many species of bird. It is tempting however to blame, as usual, the wicked farmer for everything and to feel one has no personal responsibility at all. It is indeed true that agricultural changes which have meant a decline of more than 25% in UK hedgerows since 1945 have contributed to falls in the population of such familiar countryside birds as Yellowhammers and Linnets, but privately-owned non-agricultural hedges such as may surround large country gardens are also of significance. All owners of hedges should delay maintenance work until September, and even if you yourself don't own a hedge you can help by warning hedge-cutters of the risk to any nesting birds; if warnings are ignored and the eggs or nests are destroyed, those responsible are guilty of an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. An incredible 140,000 miles of hedgerow in the UK have been destroyed since the end of the Second World War; it is therefore doubly important that where there are hedges remaining, they should be properly maintained and, where possible, allowed to grow tall and thick. Hints on how to manage them can be obtained free from **RSPB (Hedges Leaflet), The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.**

More rafts for Highland Black-throated Divers

Breeding Black-throated Divers are the focus of a major new RSPB project for 1992 – the construction and siting of an additional 32 artificial nesting islands. The construction of the rafts has been carried out by 3 dedicated teams of volunteers, from the Scottish Conservation Projects, Scottish Wildlife Trust and RSPB Highland Members Group. The support and interest of estates and angling interests have enabled the rafts to be sited at a variety of lochs throughout the breeding range where divers have had poor breeding success.

The current raft design has been developed by RSPB and the Forestry Commission over the last 6 years, after studies showed that nest flooding was one of the major problems faced by Britain's 150 pairs of Black-throated Divers. Over half of the floating islands which have been sited by RSPB in the last 6 years are currently in regular use – in one case the birds adopted the raft and nested on it within days of launch! Once covered in turf and sited at the loch the rafts blend in well and have often been mistaken for natural islands.

On average, Black-throated Divers in Highland Region have very poor breeding success, only managing to raise a chick every 3 to 4 years, while birds which have taken to rafts have been over twice as successful. This outstanding improvement in breeding success has prompted the big expansion in the RSPB raft programme for 1992, which is part funded by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Gillman Trust.

1992 also sees the start of a major study by the RSPB Research Department into chick mortality in Black-throated Divers. We will be attempting to find out why some pairs regularly hatch young which then fail to fledge – apart from nest flooding, high chick mortality is the major cause of poor breeding success by Divers.

The Black-throated Diver is very sensitive to disturbance – if you are lucky enough to see one at a hill loch this spring please keep a respectable distance between you and the bird. Any records of Black-throated Divers with young would be gratefully received – please send to **Mark Hancock or Digger Jackson at RSPB, Munlochy, Ross-shire IV8 8ND or phone 0463 81 496.**

Diver raft in process of being turfed at location *Mark Hancock*

Moulting Mute Swans being herded into the catching pen *Sylvia Laing*

Mute Swan moult catch at Loch Leven

A study of the Mute Swan population in East Scotland involving an extensive colour-ringing programme began in 1982. The ever-expanding population has resulted in a large number of birds being caught – over 1000 in Lothian alone – with a considerable amount of data gathered on movements. The importance of sites such as Montrose, Cramond and Berwick for wintering and/or moulting flocks has been established by regular monitoring and, in the case of Montrose, 3 moult catches (1980, 1983 and 1986) and one winter catch (1992). However, many birds "disappear" during the moulting period in July/August and are then re-sighted afterwards. In 1991 Loch Leven held a moulting flock of over 450 birds and it is considered that a significant number of colour-ringed birds use this site to moult. Unfortunately reading ring numbers is almost impossible at this location. Plans have been made therefore, in association with NCCS/SNH, to undertake a moult catch at Loch Leven on Saturday 18th July 1992. We are appealing for volunteers to help out with this catch. We especially require help from experienced canoeists, who will be required to manoeuvre the flock into a catching pen on the shore, and ringers to enable the processing of the birds to be undertaken as quickly and efficiently as possible. If you would like to take part in this moult catch please contact us as soon as possible and we will provide you with details of the plans for the day.

Allan and Lyndesay Brown,
61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife KY15 4UG
Tel: 0334 56804.

Replies to "Power Cable Casualties"

Iain English wishes to thank the correspondents who notified him of other 'strike areas' in Scotland proving that this problem does not just relate to the Clyde area. (SBN 22 & SBN 25).

Each person was given a prompt reply to notify Scottish Power in their respective areas, in addition to the up-to-date news and reports of the Clyde valley major 'hot spot'.

Recent developments have included replies from Scottish Power re-assuring their concern for seeking the most effective solution for this delicate situation. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust are including this 'hot spot' in their national analysis and they welcome the recent reply from Scottish Power.

However, until such time as a solution is found the pressure continues.

Iain English

Incubating Golden Plover
Edmund Fellowes

Colour Ringed Golden Plovers

In January 1992, North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory started a study of Golden Plovers using a series of individual colour rings. We are looking at movements to and from the island and also flock fidelity, amongst other aspects of Golden Plover behaviour.

Each bird carries four colour rings plus the usual BTO ring. On the right leg there is a light green above the tarsus, (this is our scheme ring). Below the tarsus on the right leg is another colour ring above the standard BTO ring. On the left leg are two colour rings below the tarsus.

Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete would be greatly appreciated. All sightings will be fully acknowledged with a print out of the bird's movements, etc.

Details to:– North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory, Twingness, North Ronaldsay, Orkney KW17 2BE.

The Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Our "illustrious leader" Frank Hamilton with long standing member Arthur Kinnear at the Annual Conference in November 1991 *Joan Howie*

This year, the annual one-day conference went on its campaign tour to sunny Ayr. To be truthful, it was very wet but the visiting members were treated to a fine display of talks. These began in the morning by three well kent faces from the Southwest. Angus Hogg led off with a fine, concise and erudite talk on the "Ayrshire bird scene" and how it has developed over the years: listing a few surveys of particular note and pointing out the successes and disappointments, finally intimating our hopes for the future.

Gordon Riddle followed with a very professional speech giving a concise appraisal of the raptor research in the Southwest. This invaluable work, by his fellow Raptor Group members, over the years, was a key issue, repeated by subsequent speakers.

Bernard Zonfrillo completed the Ayrshire picture with a look at his activities on Ailsa Craig, conveying the immense problems that rats have caused this century, but giving us confidence in his project to eradicate this pest from the island. Hopefully, the historical rafts of Puffins will soon return, along with perhaps the chance of colonisation by Storm Petrels if not Manx Shearwaters.

After we all had a most hearty lunch, Chris Rollie gave a must humorous talk, often at the expense of his boss and our President .... but I am sure Frank will forgive him. Chris showed the importance of being vigilant. If we become complacent, birds will suffer. Again, he stressed the vital work that the Raptor Group is playing in research and conservation.

Mark Avery showed the value of modern technology as an accurate means of predicting numbers of species, whilst as a bonus implying the enviable possibility of carrying out important research from the warmth of a computer room rather than having to suffer the scourge of the Flow Country i.e. clegs and mossies. His method was to examine satellite images depicting habitat in simple patches of colour which when carefully analysed are very accurate in predicting the occurrence of selected species, e.g. the density of Dunlins, Greenshank, etc. This research is particularly important in the light of the extensive forestry development in this vulnerable ecosystem.

After tea, Humphrey Crick showed us the fall and rise of the Peregrine, but pointed out that whilst we in the Southwest have the best numbers of Peregrine in the country we also have one of the poorest success rates due mostly to the habits of a very small number of collectors of both eggs and young. So we must continue to be vigilant.

Will Peach closed the conference with a talk on the importance of the B.T.O. who were after all joint promoters of the conference. Having recently moved to new premises in Thetford, the B.T.O. is particularly short of money and needs your financial support as well as help with those all important surveys.

Admittedly, the conference got off to a bad start with the poor seating arrangement by the hotel plus lack of help for the speakers in providing assistance, but once started the conference ran smoothly under the guidance of its charismatic chairmaster Frank Hamilton. The presence of St. Ann's Books gave pleasant interludes between speeches and a chance to browse the throng of newly published books (including your local author's "Seasons with the Kestrel").

All in all, it was a very enjoyable conference and I look forward to seeing everyone at the next. Those who slipped out to see the Ayr Thayer's/Kumlien's Gull at the Auld Brig had an added bonus. Finally, I am sure everyone would wish to join in thanking Michael and Sylvia for organising everything.

Bruce C. Forrester

The Sycamore: intrusive alien or welcome guest?

John Morton Boyd has recently written in the "Biologist" (1992) 39(1) a most interesting review of the history and present role of the Sycamore in British woodlands. No one knows exactly when it first appeared in this country, but it is considerably older than many people imagine, being mentioned in "The Canterbury Tales" in 1380 and figuring in a 14th century carving in Oxford. While its rapid spread – it now covers 12% of Scottish broad-leaved woodland – has led to calls to stem its onward march for fear of its competition with "traditional" species, Dr Boyd points out various beneficial side-effects, for instance that its leaf-litter, rich in earthworms, is particularly attractive to Woodcock. A study in Co Durham by K M Peck showed that Sycamore was markedly preferred by four species of tit and by Goldcrest and Chaffinch. In summing up the pros and cons of his subject, Dr Boyd concludes that a policy on planting and natural occurrence of Sycamore should specify management objectives in: (1) ancient, semi-natural woods (ASNW) with native communities including SSSIs; (2) old mixed broadleaved-conifer woods; (3) conifer plantations; (4) broadleaved plantations without Sycamore crop; (5) mixed conifer-broadleaved plantations without Sycamore crop; and (6) Sycamore plantations with other tree crop species.

As a rule, where Sycamore does not occur in (1) it should not be introduced; where it does occur in (1) it could be eliminated (if in small quantity) or its extent restricted by heavy thinning. In (2), the old mixed wood could include naturally seeded Sycamore as a *bona fide* member of the community adjusted in frequency according to disturbance and its proximity to ASNWs – close by, Sycamore might be thinned as within ASNWs. In (3), (4) and (5), naturally seeded Sycamore could be retained to provide diversity at the woodland edge. In (6), the rapid growth of Sycamore is the primary objective. Where plantations are placed on ancient semi-natural sites which are not ASNWs, but still retain some features of the relict community, naturally seeded Sycamore could be retained and managed as in (2).

Red Deer and the Environment

The pressure on native woodlands in the Highlands caused by over-grazing, which has led in some cases to no new trees growing for 200 years, has in no way been eased by the mild winter of 1991-92. The difficulty in finding shootable hinds meant that, unusually, many estates were shooting right up to the last day of the hind cull in February, and even so the Red Deer Commission believes there may be a increase in the already enormous estimated population of 300,000 deer.

The RSPB have responded to a consultation paper on deer legislation by calling for a new Deer Commission with a clear duty to conserve and enhance the natural heritage of Scotland, and for a working group to be set up and to make detailed recommendations to government within one year. Certainly, if Highland habitat is not to be further degraded, action is required quickly. The setting of a purely arbitrary overall population level of 250,000, as recommended by the Red Deer Commission ever since 1979, has little point; it is not related to the evident requirement of balancing deer population with local needs, nor has it in fact been achieved.

A Chough in your Attic

In our last issue we featured Malcolm Ogilvie's article on Islay, and in this issue we publish an appeal for funds for the new Youth Hostel accommodation. One of Islay's specialities, the Chough, has now also made the national press. In an effort to consolidate the last remaining Chough colony in Scotland, NCCS introduced a scheme to offer farmers on Islay, Jura and Colonsay up to £1200 to convert suitable roof-space into "Chough-rooms", which it is hoped, will adequately represent the deep, dark and dry natural recesses normally favoured by nesting birds. It is the lack of suitable nesting sites on Islay which has been identified as one of the most important limiting factors on any expansion in what is otherwise a healthy population. The money allocated for the first year of operation of the scheme was taken up in full, and qualified success is being claimed. We may yet see Choughs re-colonising their old mainland haunts, although modern agricultural methods with cattle over-wintering in sheds, which deprives Choughs of the cowpats which are the home of so many of the flies, grubs and beetles which are such a significant part of their diet, may yet prove an overwhelming barrier to their re-expansion.

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Flood Control in Badenoch

The rather optimistic item we included under the above heading in SBN 23 has not so far been justified by events. The report by the Institute of Hydrology, commissioned by NCCS, concluded that both schemes for flood control would have a detrimental effect on the Insh Marshes and on the gravel fan of the Feshie.

One scheme, it was decided, would have a devastating effect on the lower marshes downstream of Loch Insh, while the other would result in extensive damage to the river's gravel fan.

The Insh Marshes are a major wetland site of international importance, while the alluvial fan of the Feshie is recognised as being of national importance. While acknowledging the importance of work to reduce excessive flooding which damaged property and public utilities, the NCCS has stressed the need to take conservation interests into account. As at the time of writing, the situation thus seems dead-locked, with the NCCS calling for a moratorium on major works until the environmental implications have been fully assessed.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

Our endangered Badgers

There are vigilantes moving about Fife by night, with infra-red binoculars. It's not their fellow men they're protecting; they're protecting badgers from their fellow men who want to use dogs against them for sport. These vigilantes include men who care enough about badgers to give up their sleep, and most of their spare time, to monitor them.

The Fife & Kinross Badger Group is the only one of its kind in Scotland. J. is one of the leaders, but he cannot be named. On one occasion when he stopped the local hunt from putting their dogs down a badger sett he returned to his car to find a fox's head sitting on the bonnet, and scrawled across his windscreen, in blood: "It's your head next." He's also had late-night phone calls threatening physical injury.

J. says: "I was always interested in wildlife. I was out one night, sitting up a tree, watching what I expected to be fox cubs coming out this hole, when a black and white face appeared. I almost fell out of the tree. My God, I thought, I didn't even know there were badgers in Fife."

Ten years later, J. knows where most of the setts are. He has them marked on an Ordnance Survey map which is his most precious possession. It's information he refuses to divulge, because it would be a bonanza for the badger baiters. He spends most of his free time going round checking old setts and looking for new ones.

J. says that nobody has the "faintest idea" what the badger population of Scotland is. He suspects that because people are now more interested in badgers, they think that the population is going up, whereas what is really happening is that more people are going out looking for the animals. His group, which has been going for about 18 months, has a membership of 50 from all walks of life, from factory workers to doctors.

Badger baiters are the biggest threat. Some of them live in Fife, and there's a man who brings people up from Yorkshire to kill badgers in Fife and Ayrshire. J. gets information from people who overhear conversations in beer tents at terrier shows and in pubs.

"The baiters put a bleeping locating collar on the dog and shove it down into the sett. The dog's trained not to attack a badger; when they come face to face the dog backs off and howls. As soon as the badger turns and tries to dig a way out, the dog goes in and nips its backside, because if the men started to dig down and the badger heard them, it would be able to dig itself out much faster than they would be able to dig in, so the dog's job is to hold it in position. Once the men dig down to it they haul the badger out with tongs. They either kill it there and then with lurchers, or they take it away for a bit of sport with bull terriers."

Most farmers, estate owners, and their gamekeepers tolerate badgers on their land. J. makes his interest in badgers known, and usually he gets permission to go and look at the sett. Several farmers ask to go with him to watch the badgers. But there's another type of farmer. "One told me: 'Oh aye, you can have a look, but you'd better not find any. I like to gas them a couple of times a year just to tidy them up a bit.'"

Badger *Mary Macintyre*

This is illegal as well as barbaric, because the badger is protected under the Badgers Act of 1973, though a loophole in this Act meant that setts were not protected. On December 5, 1990, the Labour MP Roy Hughes presented a Private Member's Bill to "make provision for the protection of badger setts; and for connected purposes." There had been a similar Bill earlier in 1990, but it had failed after Conservative opposition, with concern expressed about damage to land and farm animals from setts.

The fox-hunting lobby opposed the December Bill. Hunt members go round beforehand, closing off the entrances to badger setts so that the fox can't go to earth in them. J. explains: "The members tend to take the spades to the edge of the holes and cave the sett in on itself, destroying it."

Badger *Alister Smith*

Roy Hughes' Badgers Bill was amended in a standing committee to read: "A person shall not be guilty of an offence .... by reason of obstructing any entrance of a badger sett for the purpose of hunting foxes with hounds provided that he shall not dig into the tops or sides of the entrances, that the materials so used shall not be packed hard into the entrances...."

The Bill was approved by the House of Commons last July but only after complaints from Labour MPs that it had been substantially weakened as a sop to the foxhunting lobby.

J. says: "I've been trying to arrange a meeting with the SSPCA, the police wildlife liaison officer, and the hunt to discuss the new Badgers Bill, to make sure everyone is aware of what is, and what will not be allowed."

Badger baiters with their ferocious dogs, farmers who like to "tidy up" with a can of poison, and over-zealous huntsmen with spades need to be aware that the fine for cruelly ill-treating, killing, attempting to kill, injuring or taking a badger, and damaging or destroying a sett, or obstructing access to it, is now £5000. They also need to be aware in Fife that J. goes round at 5 am, checking the condition of setts in the area to be covered by the hunt, and when the hunt is over, he goes back to make sure that there has been no damage.

J. believes: "The new Bill should help, as long as people are aware of it, but it'll probably need one or two convictions to make sure that the Bill is pushed. I would rather the badgers were left and that we didn't have to convict anybody. I don't like to have to be sneaking around, checking on people, but that's the way it is."

It's not the noisy bonhomie of the pub with its thudding darts that attracts this remarkable man who deserves recognition, except that he could be in danger. He described a recent badger watch.

"About an hour after I arrived the boar came out and wandered about on top of the sett. About five minutes later the sow came out with one cub. The cub jumped on his mother's back and chewed her ear. Then the other three cubs came out. The four of them were so vocal it was unbelievable; the whole wood was echoing with their grunts and squeals. They were running up a tree and jumping on top of each other, and rolling down the hill like a black and white snowball, legs, feet, claws."

How heartening it is that a working man (who sometimes meets badgers going home as he comes off nightshift) should love creatures to the extent that he has become an expert on them, and their protector. "I'm much more interested in wildlife than the people who come in with degrees. The scientists don't care if a hundred badgers are killed, as long as there's still 10 left, but to me every badger is a badger in its own right and I would protect every one."

Lorn Macintyre

Reprinted by permission of Glasgow Herald (13/7/91).

Badger *Alister Smith*

FOOTNOTE

Signs to look out for which indicate the presence of badgers are: dung pits at natural or man-made boundaries, scratched bark, black and white hairs, radiating woodland paths made by a squat body, and of course, large holes with heaps of old plant material (bedding) or excavated soil next to them. Skulls with crests belong to badgers as do those with large square back teeth.

Badger watching is compelling but difficult. As a rule of thumb, it is best to position oneself around sunset and expect a wait of about an hour, preferably up a nearby tree but at the very least against one, to break up the watcher's profile and to give some degree of comfort. Badgers have poor eyesight but can detect movement, therefore one has to be **very** still; noisy clothing is out, because their hearing is acute. Their best sense is smell and if the breeze is not on your face they will detect you and not appear.

There are fortnightly badger watching evenings for the general public run by the Scottish Wildlife Trust from May onwards, at New Lanark (Tel: 0555 65262).

Mary Macintyre

National Nature Reserves

The Den of Airlie, Angus was established as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) on 12th March 1992 following agreement with Lord Ogilvy/Airlie Estates and the NCCS. This brings the number of NNRs in Scotland to 69.

Straddling the Angus/Perthshire border, the 88 hectare reserve lies on the banks of the River Isla in Strathmore. Ancient woodland surrounds a spectacular gorge and has, to a large extent, been protected from human interference by the steep and locally precipitous slopes on either side of the river. A variety of woodland types have survived, including Oak on the higher ground with an underlying carpet of Woodrush. On the lower slopes are Ash and Wych Elm with Dog's Mercury, Wood Avens and Sweet Woodruff. The woodland is home to over thirty uncommon plants such as Herb-Paris and the attractive grasses Wood-Millet and Mountain Melick. The woodland also has a particularly notable wealth of mosses and liverworts and an impressive list of lichens. Several beetles are present which are characteristic of ancient woodland and some 40 species of land mollusc have been recorded, almost half of all such species found in Scotland.

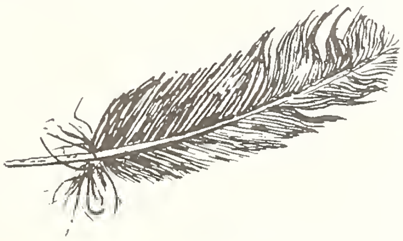
An extension by some 86 hectares to the Ben Lawers NNR in Perthshire was also announced as was the 76 hectare extension to the Caenlochan NNR in Angus.

Ben Lawers at 3,984 ft, is the highest mountain in the Breadalbane Ranges and has long been known for its diverse and internationally important arctic and alpine flora. The extension adds the remaining important area of vegetation associated with lime-rich springs, including some rare montane sedges.

The Caenlochan extension takes in the summit and southern slopes of Tolmount at the head of the White Water, near the Tayside/Grampian border. The lower, gentler slopes are deep peat with blanket mire but on the summit (958 metres and the highest point on the northern boundary of the NNR) altitude and exposure are responsible for restricting the vegetation to low-growing Bilberry, Cranberry, sedges and grasses. These summit sedge heaths are particularly scarce in Britain and form a valuable addition to the Reserve.

Dr Bill Mutch, Chairman of NCCS South East Scotland said: "We are very grateful for the co-operation of the individual landowners. Without their concern for the environment, these developments would have been impossible. With their help we aim to encourage sustainable land-management and integrate this with the conservation of nature and, where appropriate, public recreation and interpretation".

These NNRs are significantly important in that they have been notified by the NCCS before the organisation merged with the Countryside Commission for Scotland to become Scottish Natural Heritage on 1st April 1992.



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Reviews

***The Birdlife of Mountain and Upland** by Derek Ratcliffe, published by Cambridge University Press; £19.50 hardback SBN 0 521 33123 4.*

This is a well written book which gives a fascinating account of our uplands and their birds. The author, recently retired from the Nature Conservancy Council, is well qualified to attempt such a book, the first in a series that will describe and analyse the bird habitats of the British Isles. The book contains a wealth of scientific information, distilled but not obscured, with a good reference section at the end for the reader who wishes to pursue any subject further.

Upland is defined as ground above the limits of enclosed farmland, but the author recognises that this is an arbitrary definition, though in my view a sensible and workable one. Nevertheless, as he points out, areas of similar habitat do occur at lower levels. Sixty six bird species are considered to occur within this definition of uplands. The list included a couple which I more regularly associate with lowlands, the nightjar and stock dove, although they certainly fall within the definition used. Where the text concentrates on one species the bird name appears in capitals. This didn't add anything for me – it is not the first mention of the species concerned, and in any case there is a good index which allows one easily to find the text dealing with that species.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first considers the species in general and examines some of the global factors influencing the birds' distribution, such as climate and land use. The next six chapters examine the different types of upland habitat and discuss their typical birds. This comprises the meat of the book, and provides comprehensive general accounts of the birds within each without major repetition where species occur in more than one chapter. The six habitats are sheep walks, grouse moors, deer forests, the flows, maritime hills, and the high tops. The author draws on his considerable experience to give a truly country-wide account of each habitat, and discusses a number of the conservation issues as well as describing the bird interest. The chapter on the flows, for example, provides a valuable summary of much of the information contained in NCC's Bird, Bogs and Forestry, but in a form suitable for the non-specialist reader.

The final two chapters consider geographical aspects of bird distribution, such as the effects of islands and species' ranges, and bird conservation problems. The author gives a strong plea in defence of our uplands and their birds, based on the distribution of public money (eg the grants and support of agriculture and forestry) being directed to where the majority of the public wish see it go (eg environmentally sensitive management of our much valued uplands).

The book is well illustrated by Chris Rose's line drawings and numerous black and white photos. I strongly recommend it to anyone interested in the uplands, whether an ecologist wanting a wider view, or the naturalist wishing to know more of our important natural heritage.

Tim J. Stowe, RSPB Regional Officer, North Scotland

Dotterel "a breeding bird of the mountain tops" *Dennis Coutts*

***Seton Gordon – The Life and Times of a Highland Gentleman** by Raymond Eagle, Lochar Publishing 1991. 308 pp. £20. ISBN 0 948403 83 7.*

This affectionate biography is the result of diligent research into Seton Gordon's long and happy involvement in the natural and human history of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. He wrote his first book in 1907, when he was 21, and the long succession of titles which followed maintained his high standard of descriptive writing, complemented by his own or his wife's fine photographs, a few of which appear in the present book. When he died in 1977, in his 91st year, Adam Watson wrote a moving tribute to "the grand old man" who had become his friend, recalling how as an eight year old he was so excited by reading **The Cairngorm Hills of Scotland** that he wrote to Seton Gordon who quickly replied with words of warm encouragement – Adam's illustrated letter is reproduced in this book.

Raymond Eagle's biography throws fascinating light on the character and life-style of a most unusual man. Although it sometimes strays into excessive detail on matters of passing interest, I found most of the book fresh and enjoyable. Seton Gordon's background was middle class – his father was a respected Town Clerk of Aberdeen – and he grew up in comfortable circumstances, soon enjoying the friendship of lairds and princes and corresponding with many prominent people. At Oxford he drove with the young Prince of Wales in his Daimler and was invited to Tsarist Russia by the vastly wealthy Prince Youssopoff, later one of the conspirators in the murder of Rasputin. Yet all his life he seems to have preserved a benign innocence on controversial questions. He enjoyed the company of Hebridean crofters or Deeside game-keepers and counted among his admirers Desmond Nethersole Thompson, no friend of Highland Lairds. Audrey, his wife of many years, was his helpmeet on countless photographic expeditions and it was she who introduced him to photographing birds from hides.

Readers of this book will find a good sprinkling of amusing stories. He would arrive for dinner at a big house quite oblivious that the meal was almost over and once he arrived at Rothiemurchus with Audrey in a state of near collapse after narrowly avoiding driving his car over a precipice because he could not keep his eyes off a pair of Eagles.

The author devotes many pages to Seton Gordon's passion for pipe music though his playing was not appreciated by everyone on the 1921 expedition to Spitzbergen. It would have been helpful for many readers if a more detailed map had been included in the book, especially in regard to Prince Charles Edward's hide-outs after Culloden. Seton Gordon was not in tune with the methods of modern ornithology but his sense of wonder before nature shone through his writings, as in the description of a night in the Red Cuillins quoted by Raymond Eagle.

The book is nicely produced though not free of misprints and minor errors and sadly lacks a list of Seton Gordon's books. As I remember he visited the Osprey hide at Loch Garten in 1959, the year when the Ospreys first nested successfully there (not 1960).

Donald Watson

***A Guide to Birds and Birdwatching in Papa Westray (Portrait of an Island Year)** Robert A Lambert, 26 pp £2.50.*

A superb little book not to be missed by anyone wishing to visit Papa Westray. A couple of pages about the island set the scene followed by a detailed account of eight sites of particular interest, plus some general area of interest. It also gives details of access/viewing arrangements and the birds likely to be seen during the course of the year. All in all a very useful little book, which should meet with success and hopefully benefit the people of Papa Westray.

Sylvia Laing

The Great Wood of Caledon *by Hugh Miles and Brian Jackman, Colin Baxter 1991, 112p. £20.00. ISBN 0 948661 26 7.*

The Great Wood of Caledon is the name given to the pine wood that once covered a large part of the Highlands of Scotland. Nowadays semi-natural pinewoods covers less than 1% of this area. From the scattered remnants in Strathspey, Deeside, Glen Affric and others it is still possible to glimpse the structure and beauty of this ancient wood.

Hugh Miles and Brian Jackman have done just that, in film and in this book. The book starts with the history of the establishment of pine woodland after the Ice Age, then its exploitation by man and the extermination of its larger species, the wolf, elk and bear. Much of the book deals with the natural history of the remaining birds (Scottish Crossbill, Crested Tit, Capercaillie, Golden Eagle and Osprey) and mammals (Red Squirrel, Pine Marten, Wild Cat and Red Deer). It has been the Red Deer, encouraged by sporting estates, that has prevented the natural regeneration of pines and resulted in the sorry state that many of them are in today. The writing is often prosaic and personal anecdotes from the filming days add variety to the text. Visually, the book is very appealing. There are excellent photographs, many full page, mainly by Laurie Campbell and Colin Baxter, and paintings by Keith Brockie. The last chapter of the book deals with the future of the old pine woods. At last recognised as areas worth conserving many of these remnants are now protected. Conservationists now face a dilemma in the management of these areas as sanctuaries for wildlife and a place for people to experience our natural heritage. The authors express optimism that the remaining semi-natural pinewoods can be extended to cover larger parts of Scotland. For those with an interest in Highland pine woods the book is a delight.

Ron Summers

A Guide to the Warblers of the Western Paleacrctic *by T Parmenter & C Byers; 143pp, 23 colour plates, 52 maps; Bruce Coleman Books; 1991; £21 (hardback) ISBN 1 872842 01 1.*

This book aims to facilitate the field identification of 60+ species, (plus distinctive sub species and forms though not all the hybrids) of Old World Warblers and 'crests that have been recorded so far in the Western Palearctic. Some information on measurements and wing formulae is given, though less than in guides aimed at ringers. The information on field identification is much better than in general field guides or previous attempts at summarising field identification of this difficult group. The illustrations are useful if a little stereotyped in the manner of a handbook. This leads to one of my main doubts about the value of this book as its contents are presumably similar to what will soon appear in BWP. My other concern is the very high price for such a slim, though not pocket sized, volume.

Stan da Prato

"Where to Watch Birds in France" *by La Ligue Française pour la Protection des Oiseaux, translated by Tony Williams; Christopher Helm 1992; 269 pp; £12.99.*

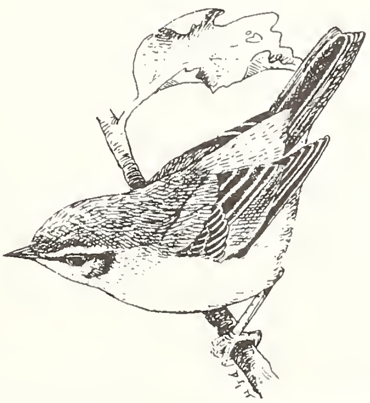
"Guía Práctica de Viaje – espacios naturales protegidos" *by L M and J L González; Editorial Debate 1991; pp; no price quoted.*

These two books will be of value to anyone heading South this summer. Although very different, both contain a wealth of information of interest to the visitor on places he or she might well otherwise remain unaware of.

The French guide is basically on the lines of the familiar British "Where to Watch ..." series. It describes 279 different walks – or "itineraries" as they are called in one of the few phrases with a distinct French ring in what is otherwise an impeccable translation – throughout France, of which 120 are in considerable detail. Practical instructions about access are backed up by clear sketch maps prepared by Julia Welstead and Mike Madders, and an index of species allows one rapidly to check on any particular bird one is looking for. For ease of reference, the various sites are divided into 21 sections corresponding to regional divisions. However, these regions are dealt with alphabetically; thus we start with Alsace in the north-east and then leap immediately to Aquitaine in the south-west, while sites in Lorraine, next door to Alsace, do not appear until p 138. One might also quibble about the "Franglais" version of some proper names, but this scarcely detracts from the book's worth: it should prove invaluable especially in drawing attention to interesting but unfamiliar sites one might well miss en route to better known areas.

The Spanish "guide to protected areas" is perhaps less accessible, although even a smattering of Spanish should enable one to make use of it. It is less specialised and by no means concerned mainly with birds. It covers all aspects of those areas protected by Spanish legislation, with a sketch-map, colour photograph of a "speciality" species, practical information on access and a description of what is to be found there. Again, its main value will be to avoid missing out on promising areas for those with general natural history interests, which probably applies to most if not all SOC members; if you're looking for Lammergeiers, it is nice to know where you might with luck see a bear or lynx as the icing on the cake. A useful and well produced little volume which covers the Balearics as well as mainland Spain.

Michael Murphy



Wood Warbler *D Mitchell*

THE PINYON JAY

John Marzluff and
Russell Balda

This once mysterious American bird is now the subject of over 20 years of intensive research of over one thousand colour-marked jays by Russell Balda, John Marzluff and their colleagues and helpers. This intriguing story will fascinate both the enthusiastic amateur birder and the professional; it presents Pinyon Jay biology in a readable form and places fine illustrations by Tony Angell, with additional pictures by Caroline Bauder, complete this attractive addition to any birder's bookshelf.

Spring 1992, £19.00
ISBN:0.85661.064.X

IN SEARCH OF SPARROWS

Denis Summers-Smith

Denis Summers-Smith started his study of the House Sparrow in 1947, since the difficulties of travel in post-war Britain best suited the study of a species always close at hand. As new opportunities to travel opened up, his interest blossomed to take in the genus Passer as a whole. This volume tells the other, human, side of the tale. His wry descriptions of the tribulations and unexpected pleasures of a traveller on four continents, from the Himalayas and Thailand, to Africa and the Americas (with a good few islands in between) are intespersed with observations and speculations on the biology of sparrows in a wide variety of habitats. The author's own photographs and delightful cartoons by Euan Dunn complement the description of this life-long search.

February 1992, £17.00
ISBN: 0.85661.073.9 141pages

Birds of the Strait of Gibraltar *by Clive Finlayson; illustrated by Ian Willis; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1992; 534 pp; £27.00; ISBN 0 85661 066 6.*

Anyone who has watched the magnificent raptor migration over Gibraltar, or spent time birding in Andalucia or northern Morocco, will welcome this book. It is a worthy successor to the earlier short works of the author and his Gibraltarian colleagues, and is an in-depth study of the migration and ecology of the birds found around the Strait of Gibraltar, including both the hinterland of S. Spain, and northern Morocco. It is written by a Gibraltarian who was stung by ornithology as a schoolboy, and subsequently trained as an ornithologist in Britain before returning to his native soil. He is now curator of the Gibraltar Museum. English speakers benefit from his bilingual ability to utilise the prolific Spanish ornithological literature to its utmost, and he knits this source very ably into the whole.

The subject matter maintains the diversity of the Poyser series and, criticisms apart, the book is up to the standard we have come to expect from the publisher, though pricey. It sets the scene with an introduction which includes discussions of the climate of the area, and migration in general. Chapters 2 to 5 describe the migration of soaring birds, other land birds, waterbirds (including a discussion on wintering) and seabirds. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss terrestrial and wetland bird communities, with the final chapter summarising the seasonality, distribution and biological importance of the birds of the Strait. Appendices list species and their status, dominant plant species, and mean densities of breeding birds at selected sites on the north side of the Strait.

The work is illustrated with an abundance of figures and photographs almost entirely produced by the author. The copious and somewhat wordy text also highlights the prodigious amount of research apparently undertaken by the author and his colleagues, and on occasions the book leans toward a rather egocentric approach. The data available reflect the imbalance in ornithological studies in the area. Data from Gibraltar itself have formed the basis of the research, particularly that concerned with the migration of raptors, seabirds and passerines, but in recent years the author has also undertaken ecological studies in Spain. Data from Morocco are inevitably sparser, with little in-depth research.

Maps are deficient in detail, and I have a number of quibbles regarding some of the calculations. One cannot meaningfully give densities to the nearest 0.01 birds per hectare, or mean number of migrants as 18.83 per hour – this is not accuracy, only absurdity. With raptor (and other) passage so influenced by wind strength and direction, rather more could have been written on the changes of wind with altitude, as radar studies have shown that much migration takes place above the low level easterly 'Levanter' wind regime. My main criticism concerns the excessive number of figures (282 in all!). Poor captioning is a fault in many, and mediocre construction in some. For example, spring and autumn counts in the same graphs are from different sources and periods, and are therefore not strictly comparable. Fig. 165 shows mean Audouin Gull numbers calculated from intermittent counts, with many years missing altogether, yet the plotted values are joined to give a continuous line. After a fascinating beginning to Chapter 6, the author launches into a jungle of graphs, over 60 of which could have been omitted or reduced to tables in an appendix. I confess that I almost gave up reading the text when faced with the tedium of studying these. Even the appendix showing breeding densities could easily have been condensed into fewer pages by simple rearrangement.

Omission of the large number of rather superfluous diagrams could have shortened the book and reduced the cost. However, the text is comprehensive and, as it is a fascinating and timely insight into a very valuable but threatened ornithological region, it must be recommended to all those with an interest in the birds of the area.

Norman Elkins

Snipe *Andy Dowell*

The Birds of Fair Isle *by J N Dymond, illustrated by D M Pullan, 1991; 148 pp; £ , ISBN 0 9518414 0 8.*

It may be a cliché to refer to Fair Isle as being a mecca for birdwatchers but the combination of quality of island scenery, a breeding seabird spectacle, the anticipation of the unexpected and the relative scarcity of people makes the island a prime candidate for a visit by any serious birdwatcher.

Much has been written about the island and its ornithological interest but surprisingly little attempt has been made to analyse the huge amount of data gathered by the Bird Observatory since it was estabished in 1948. This book fills the gap admirably.

The book opens with an introduction which briefly summarises the history of ornithology on the island. Particular reference is made to the period since the bird observatory was established and the analysis and presentation of the data are explained.

The Systematic List follows and this is the heart of the book referring to 345 species which are given full status and incorporating all available data on the birds of the island up to 1990. As such it is not perhaps a book to be read avidly from beginning to end but to be referred to as an appetiser prior to a visit to the island. Even the anti-twitcher is likely to be stirred by the prospect of the ornithological excitement a visit to the island might bring!

The text is enlivened by numerous vignettes, graphs illustrate the trend in the breeding population of 15 species and histograms portray the occurrence and migration patterns of most of the other species except extreme vagrants. 88 of the more regular and numerous species have had their data separated into 3 additional histograms to show more clearly changes since 1948. Some interesting observations are recorded such as the increase in numbers of Barnacle Geese, the decline in Corncrake observations and the remarkably consistent pattern of species such as Merlin, Wheatear and Swallow – although the latter shows increasing numbers in spring within a constant pattern of arrival. For species such as breeding auks and gulls counts are incorporated into the text although presentation as a table would have made for ease of reference. What is surprising however is that the data as presented are often not supported by an explanation for the recorded change in occurrence and trends e.g. why has Blackcap increased in autumn and Tree Sparrow become very scarce? This is a minor criticism however of a book which has set out and achieved the presentation of 40 years of non-computerised data. It provides an excellent basis for future work such as comparative studies with other migration sites; this may provide the explanation for the changes identified at Fair Isle and enable more detailed study of trends for particular species.

Although the book has been published privately and resources will have been limited the introductory text would have benefited from a short section describing the geography and habitats of the island to set the scene, together with some photographs. This would have acted both as a reminder to past visitors of the splendour of the place and as an encouragement for others to go there. It is surprising also that there is no explanation of why Fair Isle is so important for bird migration and the significance of the weather to the observations made.

Despite these criticisms however this book is an excellent addition to the ever expanding list of publications on the avifauna of Scotland. It is a must for anyone interested in bird migration and the inclusion of appendices on additions to the Fair Isle and British and Irish lists is certain to whet the appetite of even the most armchair of birdwatchers.

Allan W. Brown

Recent reports

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to **Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,** at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

Another predominantly mild winter period with wildfowl amongst the highlights as well as remnants from the **Waxwing** invasion though **White-winged Gull** numbers were low. The highlight of the period was undoubtedly a **Pine Grosbeak**, only the second ever Scottish record.

Only 1 **White-billed Diver** was reported, an adult off Rousay, Orkney with the long returning Whalsay bird in Shetland failing to put in an appearance this winter. Similarly there had been no sign of the Hermaness **Black-browed Albatross** up until the end of March at least. 6 **Bitterns** were recorded in Scotland this winter including 2 together at Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh and 1 at Insh Marshes on 1st January, the first record for Badenoch and Strathspey. The controversial immature **Night Heron** was present at Loch Leven, Kinross-shire throughout whilst a **Little Egret** was seen again near WWT Caerlaverock in January. One of the most surprising birds of the period was a **Purple Heron** on St. Kilda 17th-20th March, when sadly though not surprisingly it was found dead.

Other than the central Scotland flock of **Bean Geese**, up to 4 were seen near Montrose and 1 in January at Milton Loch, Kirkcudbrightshire. The only **Snow Goose** was a white-phase at Wigtown Bay, with the **Red-breasted Goose** remaining in the Caerlaverock area throughout moving to Rockcliffe Marsh, Cumbria at the end of March. Intriguingly another **Red-breasted Goose** was seen with **Greylag Geese** at Cults Loch, Wigtownshire on 3rd February. As many as 7 drake **American Wigeons** were reported, with singles near Campbeltown and in Ross-shire the only ones away from south-east Scotland. **Green-winged Teals** were recorded in the Western Isles, Shetland and Angus with drake **Red-crested Pochards** at Loch of Harray, Orkney and Loch of Blairs, Morayshire. 4 **Ring-necked Ducks** were reported, a drake and a duck in Kirkcudbrightshire, a drake on Speyside and 1 on Lewis. A superb drake **Ferruginous Duck** was in West Lothian from January into February. **King Eiders** were reported from Shetland, Brora, Aberdeenshire and Fife. A drake **Black Scoter** was off Dornoch, Sutherland (from 25th March) with **Surf Scoters** off Harris(2), near Wick, Portmahomack in Ross-shire, and a pair in Largo Bay, Fife. About 30 **Smews** were reported in Scotland this winter with Loch of Strathbeg, Strathclyde Park and Lochmaben having multiple counts. The only **Rough-legged Buzzard** reported was on South Uist. 3 white-phase **Gyrfalcons** were recorded typically all on islands, namely Orkney, Shetland and St. Kilda. There was also a grey-phase at Mangaster Voe, Shetland on 17th February.

An unseasonal **Quail** at Kinneil lagoon, West Lothian (at least 16th-27th January) caused a lot of interest whilst a **Baillon's Crake** reported on North Ronaldsay had almost certainly made use of the mild winter to survive from the autumn. 4 **Mediterranean Gulls** were reported from Ayrshire, Aberdeen and Musselburgh along with 4 **Ring-billed Gulls**; 2 in Aberdeenshire, 1 in Orkney and 1 at Loch of Kinnordy on 7th February, the first record for Angus. An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was reported from Banff on 29th February along with an adult **Kumlien's Gull**, another of the latter being reported from Inverness on 2nd January. The presumed **Thayer's x Kumlien's** intergrade Gull remained at Ayr throughout. This winter saw the lowest numbers of white-winged gulls reported for several years with the highest single counts again coming from Ullapool with up to 9 **Iceland** and up to 15 **Glaucous Gulls**. An **Ivory Gull** was reported flying north past Brora on 26th March.

Nothing spectacular happened on the summer migrant front up to the end of March. **Sand Martin, Chiffchaff, Sandwich Tern** and **Wheatear** were all recorded during the second week of March though single **Black Redstarts** along the east coast and in Orkney and Shetland preceded a large fall in the first week of April.

Up to 11 **Shore Larks** were still at Tyninghame into February with 1 on the Ythan Estuary in January. A **Water Pipit** was near Tyninghame also, in February. **Waxwings** were present in moderate numbers throughout with the largest groups in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and on Speyside. Only 2 wintering **Great Grey Shrikes** were reported at Loch Lomond and Ae Forest, Dumfries-shire. 3 **Arctic Redpolls** were reported at Tyninghame, on Fetlar and on North Ronaldsay. Unquestionably however the bird of the period was a 1st winter male **Pine Grosbeak** in Lerwick from 25th March, only the second ever Scottish record, the other being on the Isle of May in November 1954.

Angus Murray

Sand Martin digging out nesting hole
Edmund Fellowes

Many of the above records were featured on Birdline Scotland, an information service for Scottish birdwatchers. For the latest Scottish news telephone 0891 700234 (calls charged at 36p per min. cheap rate and 48p per min. at all other times inclusive of VAT). To phone in any sightings please call (0292) 611994 (24 hr. answerphone service).

Drake King Eider *Sam Alexander*

Islay Natural History Trust – an appeal for contributions

In his article on Birdwatching on Islay (SBN 25) Malcolm Ogilvie mentioned that the Islay Field Centre was temporarily closed pending the conversion of premises which will incorporate a 42-bed Grade 1 Youth Hostel as well as a fully equipped Field Centre. The Islay Natural History Trust needs to raise £110,000 as its share of the cost of this joint venture with the Scottish Youth Hostels Association.

Contributions may be sent to the INHT Appeal Organiser, Islay Field Centre, Port Charlotte, Isle of Islay, Argyll PA48 7TX, from whom Deed of Covenant forms and further information are available.

I hope the many visiting bird watchers to Islay will see this as an appeal with good cause and give generously.

Seabird Group Conference

Almost 150 seabird fanatics, from as far afield as New Zealand and northern Norway, attended the 1992 seabird group conference in Glasgow's Kelvin conference hall on a blustery weekend in March. The opening lecture by Robert Ricklefs was a thoroughly enjoyable discussion of the possible impact of various physiological and behavioural constraints on the evolution of pelagic seabird life history traits. His suggestion that long incubation periods may produce higher quality chicks, less prone to old age senescence, was a typically thought provoking concept.

John Coulsen's discussion of seabird regulation, which concluded that evidence of density dependent regulation of populations (as opposed to colonies) is very difficult to detect in perturbed marine systems, was another outstanding contribution. On the theme of population regulation, Etienne Danchin presented evidence to suggest that ticks may play a crucial role in Kittiwake colony demography. Jim Briskie's talk on variation in relative testes size among auks in relation to mating systems provided another example of the relevance of seabird studies to the development of general insights into evolutionary ecology.

Two presentations focused on the use of seabirds as monitors of their environment. Keith Hamer described the results of a field test on Great Skuas of theories concerning relationships between food supplies and various reproductive and behavioural parameters. Although several predictions held true, contrary to theoretical expection, he found that adult survivorship during the breeding season was markedly affected by food supply. The use of seabird eggs as monitors of pollutant levels in the Wadden Sea was described by Peter Becker.

Among the talks focused on single species, those by Mike Harris and Sarah Wanless on the feeding ecology of Shags on the Isle of May were of particular Scottish interest. Sandeels predominate in the Shags' diet throughout the year and year to year variations in laying dates may be determined by food availability. The weight of food loads brought to the colony by breeding adults increases with foraging distance, feeding rate and size of brood, but is unrelated to adult weight or weather.

Three talks related to the Shetland sandeel-seabirds story. Mark Avery of the RSPB outlined the deficiencies in fisheries stock assessment models and urged that the precautionary principle should therefore apply when setting quotas. Peter Wright of SOAFD discussed environmental and behavioural factors influencing the availability of sandeels and the implications of these factors for surface feeding and diving seabirds. Pat Monaghan described her studies of the effects on breeding seabirds of changes in sandeel availability. The chick-rearing success of Guillemots was much less affected by reduced sandeel abundance than that of Kittiwakes, apparently due to the diving Guillemots' less restrictive foraging regime and greater capacity to adjust their time budgets and so work harder at procuring prey in years of reduced supply.

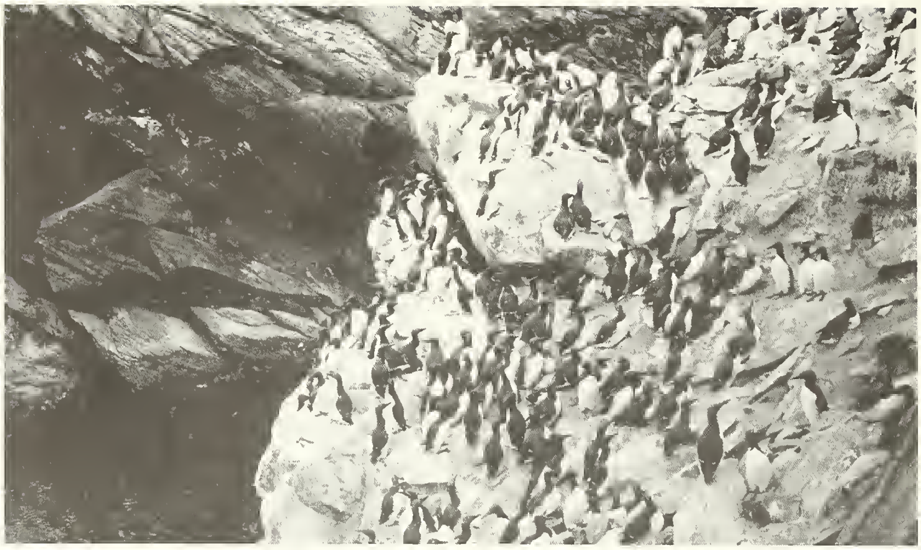
There was a strong Norwegian contingent at the conference. Rob Barrett suggested that Puffins exhibit similarities to Petrels, as their prolonged incubation period is apparently associated with reduced metabolic rates and body temperature in incubating adults. Magne Asheim concluded that breeding season weight losses in Common and Brunnich's Guillemots, nesting in an Arctic colony, arose from breeding stress, rather than having any adaptive function. Geir Gabrielsen's talk discussed variations in adult energy requirements between auk colonies in the Barents Sea. Auks got a further airing in Duncan Halley's talk about Guillemot recruitment patterns while trends in British Little and Sandwich Tern numbers and distribution were described by Jane Sears.

The majority of talks, including that by Andy Bryant on the problems of modelling biomass transfers through the North Sea's complex food webs, related to northern waters. However, the title "European seabirds" was somewhat misleading, as the programme included several excellent talks on southern hemisphere birds. The most outstanding was that given by Henri Weimerskirsch on his satellite telemetry work on Wandering Albatrosses breeding at the Crozet Islands. Breeding birds feeding chicks make very long foraging trips, covering in excess of 7,000 km over 10 to 20 days, interspersed with shorter bouts of 1 to 3 days duration restricted to adjacent shelf waters. His studies have revealed differences between sexes and even individual birds in foraging patterns and also suggest that most food is obtained by day.

Rory Wilson's film presentation of his work on swimming and diving in Penguins was both fascinating and highly entertaining, with some marvellous candid camera shots of highly puzzled Penguin onlookers viewing their compatriots swimming in an experimental tank. John Croxall returned to Wandering Albatrosses, surely the ultimate seabird, to round off the conference with a talk on factors affecting egg size and hatching success.

In addition to the talks, there was a wide-ranging poster display and, of course, the chance to meet up with fellow seabird enthusiasts and talk shop. Altogether it was a well-balanced, stimulating and smoothly run conference, for which the organisers are to be congratulated. I very much look forward to the next one.

Kate Thompson


Guillemots *Bobby Tulloch*

A Bumper Guillemot Year in 1996?

We have been monitoring Guillemot populations on the Isle of Canna for the last 18 years. This work involving counting and ringing birds was originally supported by the SOC but is now part of the JNCC Seabird monitoring programme. In the early part of the study from 1974 to 1983 Guillemot numbers were increasing rapidly, a trend that was noted at colonies throughout Scotland. Between 1974 and 1979 we ringed 2936 chicks of which 32 (1.1%) were recovered in their first year of life. Between 1980 and 1985 9518 chicks were ringed and this resulted in 266 first year recoveries, which at 2.8% represent a significant increase in the recovery rate. This coincided with a decrease in the number of five year old birds returning to Canna to breed (2.5% up to 1983, 1.5% 1983-88) and numbers of breeding birds on the island started to slowly decline. During this period several large wrecks of Guillemots occured on the east coast of Scotland.

Since 1985 the first year recovery rate of Canna Guillemots has tended to fluctuate markedly from year to year. It was very low in 1986 when only 5 birds (0.3%) were recovered. This has resulted in a fairly high return rate of youngsters from this cohort to Canna with 2.4% having been retrapped up to 1991. Recovery rates were much higher from 1987-89 averaging 2.3% but dropped to 1.6% in 1990. In 1991 we ringed 2250 Guillemot chicks on Canna and as yet have not had a single recovery. This would appear to represent an exceptionally high survival rate of this cohort. The 1991/92 winter has been very mild and fairly settled and survival rates have probably been high throughout Scotland. None of the 254 chicks we ringed at North Sutor in the Moray Firth has been recovered and Colin Crooke, organiser of the RSPB Beach bird survey in the Moray Firth, informs me that the number of Guillemot corpses picked up on their counts this winter was well below average.

All this suggests that barring unforeseen catastrophes a large number of chicks should survive to return to their breeding colonies in the next few years resulting in a surge in the breeding population by 1996.

R.L. Swann

A Cornitholiday in Scoterland

The twins were getting red-eyed from watching too much vireo, so I said to my husband, "Lisan, derling, let's go on a birdwatching holiday." But I should have known it was knot a god idea. Martin wanted to bring his friends, eider Harry or Montagu, but fortunately one of them was looking veery pallid and the other was suffering from a red-spotted bluethroat.

We packed our canvasbacks and travelled by rail. Near Bewick-upon-Tweet Rosy sora hovering bird, "It's a little 'awk" said Jack. I wanted to sea eagle and eventually spotted one on a telegraph pole – it was a real buteo.

We dove off the train at Gleneagles and thrushed off to find something tystie twite. The waiter told us to avocet and we ordered a three courser meal. Someone had been robin all the cutlery – they had bought some more but Rosy ate the spoon bill with her chicken and chips. "I'll thrasher!" shriked Jack. "Anyway, where's the cook 'oo made this muck?" "But it's bean goose sir," ansered the white-fronted waiter. I don't care what it's been, what is it now?" demanded Jack. After this awfowl joke we fled, Rosy giving a little owl became she wanted more hen – "I'm not yet fulmar."

We went to hire raven, but Jack decided to pecker four daw saloon, and set off to look for the man hoolet our holiday cottage. Though at first it was quite a pheasant evening it soon terned stormy and we wren out of petrel – the tank was leaching. "You all wheatear" I said, and started off down the road. At the nearest garage they gave me fuel in a white pelican as well as some vultures which I exchanged for smewsic tapes – Bing Crossbill singing 'White's Thushmess' and some rook 'n roller.

We stopped a man with a long black bird to ask the way. In the local accent or dialek he told us that it was the blue house, the one with the nu thatch and whauped doorframe. It was so covered by wall creeper that we could hardly see if there were tree or four windows.

What a nightingale! The trees brent and craked and by morning the house was half Tereked; even the door was off its anhingas. Jack dartered off to Peter Mygan's Dowitcherself and Hobby Shop for wood to Baird up the windows, green and purple sandpiper, a yellow hammer and a skuadiver. I felt ruff.

Next day, puffin all the way, we climbed a hill. "Keep away from the craig Martin" warned Jack. We all sat on a huge stone, chatting, then went brambling. "I've got the most" crowed Rosy, who was so choughed that she serinaded us all the way down to a meadow, where we enjoyed some fieldfare. Jack had a bowl of corncrakes followed by duck and mandarins. The kids swiftly swallowed their sandwiches and Martin had a little tern when he nearly choked on a bone, about a hawfinch long. The kids were ravenous, I had to tell them to stop shovelering in their food. They argued about whether butter was better than stork, but I enjoyed mallard on a little bit of bread and no cheese. Soon we were Forster leave by cattle and packed up without egrets. Rosy sneaked off behind a bush towhee.

On our last day I sat on a rock with water lapwing at my feet, looking through the telescaup till I got a greyhen of sand in my eye. Rosy played on her surfbird, then had a little stint on her stilts, but what she most wanted to do was catcher oysters for supper.

Jack wanted to kill deer. He was guided by a guille who vowed Jack was a great sniper. Later they rounded up some bee-eaters, filled their pockets with partridges and went to the murres to shoot grouse.

In the evening we went to a ceilidh. I didn't know what to expect, but the guillie explained it was just a bit of a caper.

Richard & Barbara Mearns

Much Ado About Ayr

Last March, the Ayrshire Branch held a successful Cheese and Wine party which was attended by our very sociable Secretary, Mike Murphy. Members mingled merrily with their wine showing an educated interest in each other's arty lapel badges depicting clues to bird names. (two coos with spots: Great Spotted Cuckoo; preggy wifie: Fulmar). One member sported her White's Thrush cap and was adorned with the paraphernalia of camera, bins and tape recorder to represent the Hobby. For the more academic, there were challenging competitions on knowledge and identification.

Then onto the important part of the evening – more wine and masses of fodder from the lavish buffet table. Fortunately, the great variety of cheeses soaked up the wine and drivers thoughtfully consumed the non-alcoholic wines. A generous raffle brought prizes for many and also provided much needed funds for the branch, so the evening was both pleasurable and profitable.

On 1st April after the A.G.M. the Ayr branch had a panel of select local lads sharing their expertise. Angus Hogg gave a very slick audio visual about the helpfulness of bird tapes for learning calls. The timing was perfection and obviously expertly prepared.

Andrew Stevenson demonstrated his drawing skills showing the feather flow of a Lark Sparrow. He displayed his many sketch books containing wonderful illustrations of birds accumulated on twitches, travels and studies.

Gordon Riddle gave a fascinating account of his work as an author showing the different stages of development from his manuscript to the finished product.

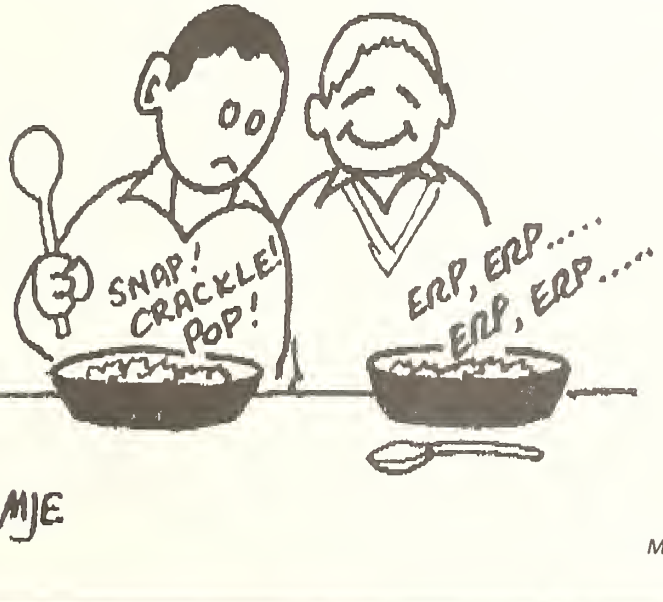
Bill McKechnie showed his camera equipment followed by fascinating slides. During this, he explained the techniques he'd used, giving away his little trade secrets. These four entrepreneurs reflect the wealth of talent within the branch.

Eleanor Forrester

Mink and Fox in the Western Isles

At a meeting in Stornoway on 24th March, a scheme was proposed by NCCS to help reduce the problems occasioned by the estimated 17 to 18,000 mink present on Lewis and Harris. At a cost of £65,000, to be met from both public and private sources, it is hoped to run a 3-year intensive trapping programme. By using live-trapping methods it would be possible to avoid accidentally killing otters and domestic pets; the mink themselves would be humanely destroyed. While it would probably be unrealistic to expect complete eradication, it should be possible to reduce the population to numbers which could then be kept at a low level. As it is , mink present an ever-growing threat to native wildlife, with the virtual disappearance of some ground-nesting birds, and have caused difficulties to fish and poultry farmers.

As if mink, originated from fur farm escapes thirty years ago, were not enough to cope with, there have been reports of a Fox on Harris recently. Given the unlikeliness of its having, as "The Scotsman" put it, either swum the Minch or joined the ferry queue, it seems that it must have been deliberately introduced, perhaps originally as a pet. Whatever its origin, its presence caused alarm among both crofters and conservationists. Admittedly one lone fox presents a minimal threat, but when will they ever learn?


SNAP! CRACKLE! POP!
ERP, ERP.....
ERP, ERP.....
MJE

Mike Everett

SOC Notices

200 Club

Winners for the first quarter of 1992 were: –
January: 1st £30 – S. Burgess, Cumnock; 2nd £20 – K.J. Lee, Aberdeen; 3rd £10 – J.S. Wilson, Aberdeen.
February: 1st £30 – S. Howe, Torphins; 2nd £20 – Miss R.M. Glen, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – T.H. McGeorge, Edinburgh.
March: 1st £30 – Dr K.C.R. Halliday, New Galloway; 2nd £20 – Miss N.F. Henderson, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – C.N.L. Cowper, Edinburgh.

By the time you read this, the 200 Club will have started its fourth year. Membership has increased annually and, at the end of May, was 161. We still aim to have 200 members. This would enable us to give £1200 to the SOC for refurbishment, and distribute the same sum in prizes throughout the year. Do please consider joining if you are not a member (existing members can always take out more than one subscription and increase their chance of winning!). The cost is only £12 per annum. Please send a cheque direct to me (payable to 'SOC 200 Club') or write and ask for a banker's order form. More than 75 members have won a prize so far – join them and help the SOC. Write to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL** (tel. 089 682 2176).

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing, although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to *Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Munlochy, Ross-shire IV8 8ND*

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to Rosemary Davidson, Phyllis Barry, Mary Black, Sheila Stewart, Margaret Mowat, Betty & Bob Smith and Mark Holling who persuaded the discussion group to do ½ an hours packing each after the meeting in March. Our sincere thanks to them all, without their help this would be an enormous task.

For Sale

IBIS Vols 101-123 (1959-81). Complete in parts, including special Centenary Expedition Volumes. Offers to Bill Harper, Librarian, SOC.

Borders Branch Outings

21st June, Glensax. Meeting at Kingsmeadow Car Park at 9.00 am. Bring packed lunch.
4th October, St Abbs. Meet Northfield Car Park at 9.30 am.
Please contact Malcolm Ross if you intend going on either of these outings 089 682 2132.

Branch Meetings 1992/3

The programme of speakers for the 1992-3 season will, as usual, be distributed with the mailing at the beginning of September. However, since members may not receive this until a couple of weeks before the first "members' night" meetings, they will wish to note the following dates in their diaries for these September meetings:

Ayrshire: 7.30 on 23 Sep
W. Scotland Agricultural College, Auchincruive.

Borders: 7.30 on 21 Sep
George & Abbotsford Hotel, Melrose.

Caithness: 8.00 on 23 Sep
Pentland Hotel, Thurso.

Clyde: 7.30 on 21 Sep
Art Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove.

Dumfries: 7.30 on 23 Sep
High Street, Dumfries.

Fife: 7.30 on 16 Sep
Golf Club Hotel, The Scores, St. Andrews.

Grampian: 7.30 on 14 Sep
Dept. of Zoology, Tillydrone Ave, Aberdeen.

Highland: 7.45 on 22 Sep
Loch Ness House Hotel, Inverness.

Lothian: 7.30 on 15 Sep
Napier College, Craiglockhart.

Orkney: 8.00 on 17 Sep
Flotta Terminal Sport & Social Club, Kirkwall.

Stewartry: 7.30 on 17 Sep
Kells School, New Galloway.

Stirling: 7.30 on 24 Sep
Smith Art Gallery & Museum, Stirling.

Tayside: 7.30 on 24 Sep
Wellgate Library, Dundee.

W. Galloway: 7.30 on 22 Sep
The Library, London Road, Stranraer.

Apologies

Apologies to Eric Middleton, who won second prize in the Annual Photo Competition, we incorrectly credited Bill Middleton instead of Eric, our sincere apologies.

Conference Arrangements

As announced in the last issue, this year's Annual Conference will be held on the weekend of 30 October to 1 November at the Badenoch Hotel at Aviemore. Details and booking forms will be distributed, as usual, with our next mailing in late August/early September, and it is hoped that the change of venue will encourage as many as possible of our Northern members to attend. On the other hand, the excellent road and rail connections from the South should, we hope, also not put off those from the more populous regions of Sotland and, indeed, England.

Plans are well advanced for the 1993 Spring conference. This will be held on 13 March. The final decision on the venue has not as yet been made, but in accordance with the usual policy of rotating the Spring conference round the country, it is the turn of Central Scotland, and will almost definitely – depending merely on a bit of financial haggling – be in or near Perth.

Papa Westray Bird Book

"A Guide to Birds and Birdwatching in Papa Westray" £2.50 from Papay Community Co-operative, Papa Westray, Orkney.

Sales Items

SOC Sweatshirt Navy with pocket-size SOC logo. Small, Medium, Large and Ex Large.	£10.50
SOC Ties Polyester with repeat SOC motif. Navy, Maroon, Drk Green & Drk Brown.	£5.95
SOC Badge Enamelled metal lapel badge. New reduced price.	£2.00
SOC Car Sticker Plastic, self-adhesive SOC motif.	£ .75
SOC Fieldlist A pocket-sized checklist of all species regularly occurring in Scotland. New reduced price.	£ .50
SOC Checklist An annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. New reduced price.	£ 1.00

All prices include post and packing (except overseas – add £1.50) **SOC (Sales) 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT (031-556 6042).**

SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:
Adult £12.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £5.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £18.00
Life, individual £240.00, family £360.00
Pensioner, individual £7.00, family £10.00
Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 31 March for the June number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Contributors should note that all items are accepted subject to editing and that it is not normally practical to let authors check proofs.

Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC
Printed by Ritchie of Edinburgh, 163 Bonnington Road, Edinburgh EH6 5RE

BIRDS

THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1992 No. 27
ISSN 0268-3200

Edited by Sylvia Laing,
Michael Murphy and
Kate Thompson

Birdwatching in Sutherland

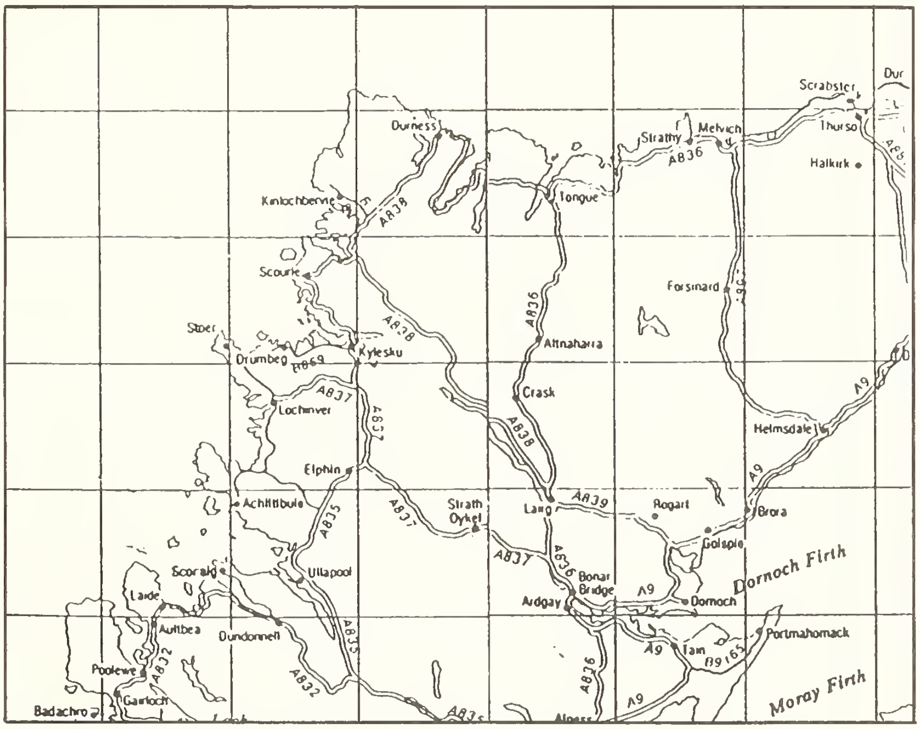
Sutherland is a large district with a wide variety of habitats offering opportunities for good bird watching at any time of the year. Being only sparsely populated by humans there are many aspects of the birds of the area remaining to be discovered though there are a number of well known 'hot spots' such as Loch Fleet, Dornoch Firth, Embo, Brora, Handa and Cape Wrath. In winter time the main attractions are on the east coast with waders and wildfowl in abundance making use of the rich feeding in the intertidal areas of the sea lochs as well as inshore waters along the coast. While migration watching is usually not spectacular as the east coast is rather tucked in and in the shadow of the Buchan coast, suitable autumn weather conditions can bring large onward passage of Redwings and Fieldfares following the coast down from Caithness and arrivals on the north coast can be easier to detect. A number of scarcer passerine migrants have been recorded in recent years. In summertime attention is worth focusing more on the hills and the magnificent seabird colonies in the north-west at Handa and Cape Wrath.

The East Coast

The east coast sea-lochs and shoreline of Sutherland provide excellent bird watching at any time of year but are particularly rewarding in the September round to April period. Visiting waders and wildfowl are not only present in large numbers but are also easily accessible by car so that even if the weather is wet and windy a variety of suitable watching points are available where birds can be viewed at very close range. Information on the numbers of birds involved has been built up over more than 20 years of estuary counts.

This is particularly true of Loch Fleet where the road along the south shore provides a number of convenient passing places to pause in as well as a car parking area at Skelbo Point. Waders gather at three main places to roost at high tide – Skelbo Point, the beach at the mouth of the Fleet and the salt marsh area in Balblair Bay – with up to 1800 Oystercatchers, 250 or so Curlew, frequently over 400 Redshank, up to 150 Ringed Plover, sometimes over 1000 Dunlin and occasionally up to 1000 Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit though the last three species are more mobile in their habits and are more often in their largest numbers at Dornoch Point and along the shore towards the new Dornoch Bridge. Numbers may sometimes be in excess of 3000 Dunlin, 1500 Bar-tailed Godwit and 1500 Knot at Dornoch – but not every year! It is always worth being on the lookout for the odd Black-tailed Godwit among the Bar-tails. Embo and Brora are better places for Turnstone and Purple Sandpiper with smaller numbers of the other common winter waders. Sanderling are usually confined to small numbers (usually less than 20) at Brora while Dornich is the favourite spot for Grey Plovers with up to 30 on occasions. It is unusual to see Greenshank in winter time but spring arrivals and autumn gatherings at the Mound Pool on Loch Fleet are regular. Dornoch seems to be the favoured site for the scarcer migrants such as Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff in the early autumn.

Wildfowl also feature strongly in the winter with up to 10,000 Wigeon recorded at Dornoch in the past. Loch Fleet usually holds over 2000 Wigeon in winter and there are smaller numbers of Mallard and Teal. Both Green-winged Teal and American Wigeon have been recorded at Loch Fleet in the past ten years. The Shelduck numbers start to build up from late November as they make their way back from the moulting grounds. Other dabbling ducks, apart from regularly up to 150 Pintail at Dornoch, are rather infrequent but sea ducks are another East Sutherland speciality. The winter Eider flock at Loch Fleet has reached 3000 in the past but numbers in recent years have not been much over 1500. Male King Eiders have been recorded every year since 1973 with one or more appearing to have taken up permanent residence. Up to 3 have been recorded at a time and with immatures seen on a number of occasions there have obviously been a variety of individuals involved. The last couple of years have seen King Eiders being a bit more elusive and sightings last winter suggested that a bird was spending much of the time well off Brora and only coming close inshore occasionally. Long-tailed Ducks are regular in moderate numbers though fewer than in the '70s with Embo being a good place for good views. Scoter are featuring again in good numbers after a decline from the late '70's but now the larger numbers seem to be in spring off the Dornoch/Embo area with up to 1000 Commons and 400 Velvets with 2



Sutherland, with some of Scotland's most inaccessible and beautiful countryside.

or 3 Surf Scoters and what appears to be a regular Black Scoter in the past three years. Late March to early May has been the best time.

Also from the shore, particularly from Embo and Brora, Red-throated, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers are all regular in winter but good counts depend very much on the sea conditions being calm. The same goes for the grebes with Slavonian the most frequent but occasional Black-necked, Red-necked and Great Crested. With regular sustained sea-watching now being conducted at Brora a pattern of movements of the commoner seabirds such as Razorbill, Guillemot, Puffin, Gannet, Kittiwake, Fulmar etc is now building up. NE to E winds are the most productive for Shearwaters and Skuas. As well as the expected Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, Great, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas, sightings have also included Great Shearwater, Cory's Shearwater, Grey Phalarope and a clutch of scarce gulls including Sabine's, Bonaparte's and Ivory in addition to Iceland, Glaucous and Little Gulls.

King Eider displaying (Common Eider in background) S M D Alexander
A straggler which turns up in Sutherland on a regular basis

Breeding seabirds

The north and west are richest in bird life in the breeding season when the seabird hordes make use of the strategic nesting areas such as Handa and Cape Wrath. Handa has long been a bird reserve, now with management transferred from the RSPB to the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Boats run daily except Sundays during the summer and a visit is a must if you are in the area. May and June are the most spectacular with the Great Stack Guillemot colony filled to capacity with birds leaving with their young from early July. The Great and Arctic Skua populations have increased over the years and with the marked path going through what has become breeding areas very close views of some of the birds are possible as they have become very tolerant of passing human visitors.

On the east cost a small part of the huge Caithness cliff colonies of seabirds spills over the boundary into Sutherland and it is now possible to take a boat trip out of Helmsdale along the sea cliffs as far as Berriedale to view the birds. Again May to early July is the best time to see the colonies at full strength.

Long-eared Owl J F Young
One of the Sutherland species which is probably frequently overlooked

Mountains and moorland

For the energetic summertime hill walking is both exhilarating for the spectacular views and rewarding for what you might turn up. Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin, Raven, Ptarmigan and Ring Ouzel are all potential features while there remain possibilities of Dotterel and maybe even Snow Bunting from time to time on occasional tops. On the lower surrounding ground Dunlin, Curlew and Golden Plover can be found with Common Sandpipers around the loch edges and in the burns while the Greenshank has its British headquarters in the bogs of Sutherland. The possibility of stumbling across exotic waders should be borne in mind and great care taken always remembering the special protection afforded under the law to rare breeding birds.

Greylag Geese nest in a few peatland lochs and a couple of hundred or so congregate at Badanloch to moult in July. Some of the larger lochs hold Black-throated Divers while Red-throats will make use of much smaller lochans. Wintering Whooper Swans may be scattered over a variety of lochs in the north-west and Barnacle Geese from the Greenland populations spend the winter on the offshore islands of Island Roan and Eilean Hoan off the north coast and can be watched and counted from the mainland. Handa and the islands in Badcall Bay are also wintering sites for Barnacle Geese. Great Northern Divers are a feature of the north coast in winter and spring with Balnakeil Bay, Loch Eriboll and the Kyle of Tongue offering shelter.

Sea-watching from prominent points in the north and west has always offered potential with Strathy Point, Farr Point, Stoer Point and Handa all turning up a varied mixture of seabirds. At all of them the weather conditions may be fairly critical with the west coast sites proving excellent with strong north-west winds. On Handa gales on 21st May in 1991 resulted in 110 Pomarine and 120 Long-tailed Skuas being recorded while a northwesterly gale on 16th August 1990 resulted in 1500 Storm Petrels and 2500 Gannets.

Woodland

Much of the woodland of Sutherland is man generated with the large areas of conifers being planted in the last 50 years and only remnants of native Scots Pine to be found in Strath Carron and Glen Einig. Oak woods such as those at Spinningdale and Tressady are estate planted and birch woods are often restricted to the steeper rocky areas to which grazing animals cannot get.

Chaffinch and Willow Warbler are probably the dominant breeding passerines with Blue, Great and Coal Tits widespread. Redstarts and Spotted Flycatchers are also fairly common but Wood Warblers and Tree Pipits are more restricted in their distribution with the area around Loch Migdale and Spinningdale oak wood being particularly good. The track along the north side of Loch Migdale makes a particularly pleasant walk and the East Sutherland Bird Group has a regular May field meeting with Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit and Redstart as particular favourites while Redpolls, Siskins and sometimes Crossbills all add to the variety. Other warblers are relatively scarce with only a handfull of Chiffchaff records each year, Sedge Warblers quite restricted in their numbers, Whitethroats apparently scarcer still in recent years and Garden Warbler and Blackcap almost rarities. Blackcaps are probably commoner as winter visitors to bird tables than as a breeding bird and summer singing birds may well be unmated males as is probably the case for most records of Grasshopper Warbler. Redwings usually breed in small numbers but many probably go unrecorded.

The Crossbills in the north east of the county are thought to be exclusively Common Crossbills, presumably resulting from past irruptive arrivals from Scandinavia, while those in the south east are predominantly Scottish Crossbills and little overlap seems to occur. The young conifer plantations provide feeding and nesting areas for Hen Harriers but Short-eared Owls seem to be relatively scarce. The mature trees provide nesting sites for good numbers of Sparrowhawks and Buzzards and while Long-eared Owls are known to occur in small numbers many are probably overlooked. Crested Tits do breed in very small numbers but finding them is much a case of luck and again birds may well be overlooked.

Sutherland offers many opportunities for a variety of bird watching activities from an enhancement to general exploration of the countryside, through planned visits to see some of the specialities of the area, to serious study of individual species or habitats. Whatever your interest your observations could well add useful information to the ornithological knowledge of the area so it would be much appreciated if visitors would pass their records to the local recorder.

Tony Mainwood

Isle of May Visitors

Spring migration on the Isle of May was relatively subdued until 21st May when with eastern winds one Bluethroat arrived together with a Nightingale sp. For the next fortnight small numbers of migrants visited the Island, but whilst quantity was lacking quality was most certainly not. Easterly winds prevailed in the latter part of the month and a Quail and a Short-toed Lark were seen on 24th with two Icterine Warblers, a Green Sandpiper and a Wood Sandpiper arriving on the 27th. Two days later a Greenish Warbler was present but sadly did not stay until the weekend for the visiting Clyde branch members to see!

Nevertheless, on the 30th, 3 Icterine Warblers, a Black Redstart, a Scarlet Rosefinch and a Red-breasted Flycatcher were present. The following day at least one Marsh Warbler was found, as was a Reed Warbler. A thick haar on 1st June did not prevent a Golden Oriole reaching the Island, and with clear skies on the 2nd a Honey Buzzard flew south over the Island attended by assorted Gulls, Terns and Oystercatchers. No new arrivals were seen on the 3rd, but a flat, calm sea enabled those present on the Island to see a pod of six Sperm Whales for approximately an hour and a half in the evening. The whales appeared to comprise four adults and two juveniles. They were a marvellous sight and despite their distance their unique shape of head and lower jaw was clearly visible, as was the forward blow. On the 4th a Night Heron arrived, presumably not from Edinburgh Zoo and on the 5th a Red-backed Shrike appeared. Two days later, two Melodious Warbler were present and these brought to an end an excellent spell for the Island.

Ian Darling

Lapwing at nest *A Gilpin*

Isle of May looking towards the Low Light and the North Horn. The inhospitably rocky appearance of this stretch of coast does not deter migrants seeking landfall.

Helping the Lapwings at Vane Farm

Vane Farm on the shores of Loch Leven has been an RSPB reserve since 1967, and a recent purchase of adjacent farmland now brings the reserve to a total of 231ha.

Large numbers of waders and duck used to breed around the shores of the loch, but over the years as agricultural land has been drained these areas have undoubtedly become less suitable. Numbers of breeding Lapwing have halved over the last 30 years. A temporary dam already completed has created a sufficiently wet area where 4 pairs of Lapwing bred this year. Work is now in progress to build a permanent dam, which will hopefully see a rise in breeding Lapwing in the future.

Conservation News

During the summer, the Scottish Office produced a consultation paper on private agriculture and forestry roads. There can be no doubt that vehicle tracks in wild land have caused and are causing significant environmental damage. Scottish Natural Heritage has identified the major problem as:

1. the scarring of the landscape by badly located and designed tracks
2. poor construction, leading to erosion and drainage problems in areas of fragile habitat;
3. easier access to areas already under pressure from visitors
4. the erosion of 'wild land' quality in Scotland's remoter areas,

and calls for more stringent control of planning and construction.

A consultation paper was also produced by the Cairngorms Working Party, to which the SOC has submitted its reactions. While agreeing with its key principles, environmental sustainability, ecological health, social & economic well-being and responsible recreation and tourism, we felt that insufficient weight was given to the practical methods of implementing these. Thus the conclusion to our submission was that of "disappointment at the fact that there seems little concrete action planned to put these excellent precepts into the domain of practical application".

We understand that similar reaction came from various other organisations, such as the Save the Cairngorms Campaign and the RSPB, and can only hope that the Working Party accepts these comments and follows their well-meant advice.

While the conservation of Scotland's wild areas and their associated wildlife, in particular their birds, is obviously a cause dear to the heart of the Club and its members, it is salutary not to forget the interests of the industrial heartland. Thus we must welcome the news of the "Jupiter Project" at Grangemouth. A 10-acre derelict site has been transformed into an oasis for wildlife, with ponds, meadows and trees. It is especially gratifying that this venture, a joint undertaking by SWT and ICI, has received significant sponsorship from various local industrial concerns; awareness of a "green approach" to our environment is becoming more and more widespread.

A female Goshawk at her nest in a Spruce tree *A Gilpin*

Persecution Still a Major Problem for Birds of Prey

Despite growing realisation by many landowners and their employees that birds of prey do no real harm, scores of persecution incidents are still reported each year. Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, White-tailed Sea Eagle and Red Kite, some of Scotland's rarest birds, are still being persecuted.

Golden Eagles were exterminated through persecution in all but Scotland during the 18th and 19th centuries, and although the Scottish population now stands at about 450 pairs, its full recovery is still hampered by persecution.

Hen Harriers have suffered severely from persecution since the 19th century and still do so today particularly on grouse moors in Scotland. Although the Scottish population stands around 500 breeding pairs there is still room for expansion in areas of suitable habitat.

White-tailed Sea Eagle became extinct as a breeding bird in Scotland in 1916. However, after a successful reintroduction programme using a total of 82 Norwegian birds the first pair bred again in Scotland in 1985 and a record 4 pairs raised a total of 7 young in 1991. They are however still under the threat of persecution.

Red Kites suffered severe persecution to the point of extinction in Scotland and England during the 19th century, with only a handful of pairs hanging on in Wales; with increased protection there this has risen to 76 pairs in 1991. A reintroduction programme is currently going on in Scotland and England with a single chick being reared in Scotland in 1992. Red Kites being carrion feeders are extremely susceptible to poisoning.

Peregrines are under threat from egg collectors some of which are believed to be taken for falconers in Germany and the Middle East. Several dozen adults are shot and trapped, and nests containing eggs or young are destroyed each year.

Other species which still suffer from illegal persecution include Buzzard, Goshawk and Sparrowhawk.

The RSPB are calling for changes to the law to increase the likelihood of successful prosecutions of those who persecute birds of prey and to introduce stiffer penalties. Increased sentencing options would provide effective alternative deterrents to fines. Custodial sentencing would allow for suspended sentences, probation, community service and court orders. Amendment to Scottish legislation on level of evidence required in a court of law would increase the possibility of successful prosecutions where there is only one witness. The RSPB is also calling for:

a. greater restriction on the availability of poisons.

b. amendment of legislation to permit the refusal of licences for the use of, burying or storage of poisons.

c. improved management of habitats, game and livestock to reduce levels of predation, and the use of specific legal methods of predator control.

d. more resources from Government to help reduce birds of prey persecution and improve the investigation of offences.

Concern about continued bird of prey persecution has also been expressed by the Game Conservancy, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, Scottish Landowners' Federation and Moorland Gamekeepers' Association.

A Freephone hotline for reporting suspected cases is available on 0800 321600

The RSPB has recently launched a £400,000 appeal to help protect our superb birds of prey. Let's make it work before it's too late.

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Crane Counters Needed

One of our members, Steve Newton, has recently moved to Saudi Arabia to work for the National Wildlife Research Centre at Taif. As a fanatical goose counter, Steve is somewhat frustrated by the lack of any true geese near his new home. However, he is developing a keen interest in the so-called "Iraqi Goose", or Demoiselle Crane, which is regarded as an endangered species.

These birds migrate over Saudi Arabia between their breeding grounds in the steppes of west central Asia and their wintering grounds in northern Africa. Reports of migrating cranes from the richly cultivated Hail region in the Jebel Aja range of north central Saudi Arabia led Steve and his colleagues to investigate this area's use as a possible migration staging post. Over a ten day period in late March this year they counted over 4,500 migrating cranes, more than ever previously recorded for this species. The observed pattern of the migration suggests that the cranes may experience a bottleneck at their crossing of the Red Sea.

In order to obtain a better minimum population estimate for the Demoiselle Crane, Steve would like to extend this work next spring. He hopes to have two larger teams in the field for a longer period, one at Hail and one around Jeddah and the Red Sea coast. If you are interested in volunteering, Steve can be contacted at: **NWRC, PO Box 1086, Taif, Saudi Arabia.**

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A Greener Europe?

If the goverment were to follow the advice of the RSPB, the UK could use its presidency of the European Community to initiate steps to counter the urgent environmental problems now facing the community as a whole.

Throughout Europe, the intensive agriculture which has been encouraged by the Common Agricultural Policy has contributed to drastic declines in wild life, be it Lapwings in the United Kingdom or Great Bustards in Spain. The RSPB's priorities for action include:

Developing and funding new environmental schemes as part of the May 1992 Common Agricultural Policy reforms;

reforming EC regional development policy;

conserving fish stocks and protecting the wider marine environment (which the EC environment action programme fails to address);

a strategy for the sustainable management of Europe's coastlines;

better protection for important wildlife sites throughout the EC including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (of which more than 200 were damaged in 1990/91).

Copies of the document "Greening Europe"; the RSPB Environmental Vision for the European Community" are available from the RSPB at The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL.

Isles of Colonsay
and Oronsay –
Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
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N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

The 1992 Breeding Season Round-up

January and February were mild and windy with ferocious gales in the north at New Year. Both relatively dry with little snow but wetter in the south west in February. March also mild and breezy and very wet in the south latterly but April was dull and cool with more than average rainfall. Most of May and June were dry and warm with light winds, much sunshine especially in the west. The end of June and July were unsettled.

Tawny Owl *D A Smith*
An earthworm is brought home to an owlet just visible on the left of the picture

Raptors and Owls

Most of the raptor species appear to have had a very poor year, possibly due to the weather conditions in April and early May when snow was lying at fairly low altitudes, although in one area at least the density of moorland passerines appears to be very patchy. Predation is also a main cause of failure in a number of areas, notably fox predation in part of Perthshire. A few exceptions are noted however. Hen Harriers appear to be doing fairly well in Grampian, but have had their worst season since 1979 in Orkney, where Merlins have had the best season for many years. This is also the case in Shetland; elsewhere however they have had mixed fortunes. Golden Eagles had many failures but appear to be all right in Skye. Peregrines also had failures early in the season and none is known to have bred in Shetland this year. Kestrels in one area at least have had a late start to the breeding season, with higher than average failure rates. Buzzards in NE Fife are on the increase having been fairly scarce in the past.

Tawny Owls have not done well, with birds not attempting to breed at all in parts of SW Scotland, and only 5 young reared from 7 pairs in an Ayrshire study area; although in Easter Ross they started off fairly well, many failures resulted in below average success. In SW Scotland 33 pairs of Barn Owls were on territory but only 4 pairs had subsequently laid by the middle of May. Signs of laying up to the end of the month have been noticed however, and the situation is still unclear. Likewise Short-eared Owl numbers fell from 20 pairs in 1991 to 2 pairs in 1992 and a pair of Long-eared Owls were still incubating 2 eggs on 25th June.

Game Birds

The poor spring may also be partly to blame for the poor counts of Black Grouse at leks in SW Scotland although they appear to be all right in NE Scotland. Several good broods of Capercaillie have been reported from Grampian and Perthshire. Again in west Perthshire numbers of Red Grouse with 6 to 10 chicks are fairly common.

Seabirds

The Firth of Forth and Shetland seabird colonies appear to be doing as well as last year, although early Shag breeders at the former were failing due to gales; thereafter the breeding success appears to be about normal, with a further increase in numbers on other islands in the Forth and a new colony starting on Inchcolm.

Terns on the other hand are showing different trends in differing parts of the country. Arctic Terns for instance are doing quite well in north Orkney but very badly in south Orkney. Similar numbers to last year were on the Isle of May, and none on Arran, while the Common Tern seems to be continuing its decline in some areas.

Black Grouse *R T Smith*
Poor counts have been recorded in the South West this year

Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills are doing reasonably well in the Forth islands and Shetland with no apparent decrease in numbers. Kittiwakes are however, doing badly at North Sutor but look to be all right on the Isle of May, and the colony at Dunbar has a good number of twins amongst them although the final productivity figure will not be known for some time.

Waders, Wildfowl and Waterside Birds

Waders in general in East Scotland appear to have done badly with the exception of a few good areas notably Orkney and SW Scotland. The numbers of Greenshank in Skye this year is quite impressive.

Ducks appear to have had a mixed season, with some broods only being seen in the middle of July; although Mute Swans in Lothian and Fife areas have broods of 5/6, it is thought that the cold east coast haar in early June affected some of the late broods, and mink may be responsible for predation in some areas. In Orkney Mute Swans were down to 13 breeding pairs on Harray and Stenness Lochs possibly due to the demise of the Canadian Pond weed which peaked in 1990, and from 14 pairs to 4 pairs in Easter Ross.

Red-throated Divers are once again doing fairly well in Shetland.

A large proportion of Black-headed and Common Gull chicks died in Easter Ross during June, presumably due to the drought conditions.

Again we have conflicting reports regarding Dippers and Wagtails, ranging from Dippers being washed out in April/May with high water levels to some having 2 broods, and in one area being absent completely. Pied and Grey Wagtails appear on average to be doing slightly better than last year, and the only report of breeding Kingfisher came from N Fife.

Red-throated Diver *W S Paton*
A species which seems to be thriving in Shetland

Summer Migrants

Warbler spp seem on the whole to be doing a lot better this year with good reports received from many areas although late arrival appears to have been noticed throughout. The only report of no Whitethroats came from the Dornoch area, although they appear to be down in some other areas.

Stonechats are on the increase in many areas, but are particularly noticeable in N Perthshire.

Spotted Flycatchers are doing well in most parts of Scotland but are almost absent from Sutherland, while Pied Flycatchers continue their decline around Inversnaid and are about average in W Perthshire.

Hirundines are however having mixed fortunes. House Martins have crashed in parts of Lothian, but large increases have been recorded in Central, with new sites being colonised. Sand Martins in the Borders area are at half of last year's occupied nests. Swallows however appear to be holding their own. In Perthshire Swift numbers appeared to be lower than normal at the start of the season, but quite large numbers were screaming around by July.

Nightjars in SW Scotland were in all the usual sites and some new sites have been discovered this year. Cuckoos are well up around Inversnaid with 5 individual males being heard at one time.

The only Corncrake report received would suggest that numbers are declining in Skye with fewer reports of calling males.

Other Songbirds

In contrast to last year Crossbills appear to be few and far between. Skylarks still appear to be declining in some areas, and Meadow Pipits doing poorly in Grampian. This could affect some of the raptor species' breeding success as could numbers of Wheatear, Whinchat and Ring Ouzel. More Redwing were recorded in Easter Ross than previously; this could be due to the cold spring holding them up from moving further north. Most of the Tit species are doing fairly well, and Siskins although later than normal are reported to be doing well. Corn Buntings are still very scarce in N Fife but the usual pockets are still occuring.

Thanks to: Allan Brown, J Calladine, Brian Cosnette, Andrew Currie, Colin Edwards, Norman Elkins, Pete Ellis, Stephen Fulford, Mike Harris, David Hodson, A Joss, Nigel Mann, Wendy Mattingley, Eric Meek, D Macdonald, Brian Neath, Stan da Prato, Tristan ap Rheinallt, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, Malcolm Ross, Geoff Shaw, Marion Shimeld, Bob Smith, Bob Swann, Mike Trubridge and Sarah Wanless.

As always we stress that fieldworkers' first impressions are not to be interpreted as the definitive account of the season for 1992. That comes later when the appropriate bodies have analysed all the data. Many of the contributors to the summary you have just read are participants in the Common Bird Census or the Waterways Bird Survey organised by the BTO with backing from SHN.

Sylvia Laing

Stonechat (female) *J F Young*
Many areas are seeing an increase in numbers of this attractive bird.

Woodland Acquisition in Lochaber and Skye & Lochalsh Region

The launch of Scottish Natural Heritage's operations in Lochaber and Skye & Lochalsh Area was marked this summer by the welcome addition of a further area to the Glencripesdale NNR, increasing this from the original 93 hectares to 609 hectares. Given the tenuous foothold retained by Scotland's ancient native woodlands, this is welcome news to all who care about the Scottish environment and its wildlife. As elsewhere, there has been little natural regeneration of the woodlands in this area for many years, owing to the heavy grazing by the deer population. One must hope that SNH will be able to manage this attractive area on the south side of Loch Sunart to the benefit not only of the trees but also of the reserve's natural inhabitants which include not only woodland and moorland birds but Wild Cat, Pine Marten and Otter.

Red Kites breed again in Scotland

The 1992 breeding season will be remembered for the first breeding attempt since 1890 of Red Kites in Scotland. A pair which had been brought over from Sweden in 1990 and released bred at a secret location in the Scottish Highlands, laid and hatched 3 eggs. Unfortunately, however, only one chick survived. This goes some way to achieving the aim of the project, to reintroduce Red Kites as a breeding bird again in Scotland.

Red Kite *Hans Reinhard/Bruce Coleman*
This photograph appeared previously in SBN 15 in September 1989, on the occasion of the original re-introduction. At that time we speculated when we might see successful breeding of an introduced pair. Now we know the answer: 1992!

On Friday 24th July a further 24 Swedish Red Kites were released from a secret location following a five week quarantine period. All the birds have been wing-tagged and carry radio transmitters so that their movements can be monitored. Should you see a RED KITE please contact RSPB Highland Office IMMEDIATELY. Tel. 0463 715000.

Since 1989 when the reintroduction programme started nearly 70 Red Kites of Swedish origin will have been released in Scotland, and it is hoped that more pairs will attempt to breed next year.

The project involves co-operation from a number of bodies and a major boost this year came from Conoco UK in the sum of £28,000.

Reviews

The Pied Flycatcher *by Arne Lundberg and Rauno V. Alatalo; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1992; 267 pp; £19; ISBN 0 85661 072 0.*

In these days when so much research effort is devoted to predators, waders and seafowl, it is indeed a pleasure to welcome a book on a "small bird", and especially one of this calibre. The Pied Flycatcher, as the authors point out, is one of Europe's best studied birds, providing, by reason of its confiding nature and propensity to take up nest boxes, an excellent opportunity for a study, not only of the species itself, but of a wider range of problems in bird behaviour and ecology. While much of the material used, especially from Sweden and Finland, has already been published in scientific journals, this book represents a worthy attempt to draw together under the same heading all information on particular topics affecting the species from whatever source and whether previously published or not. The exhaustive list of References runs to some 15 pages.

The book is based on the authors' own researches primarily in Sweden and Finland, but with the addition of further data obtained by them in Cumbria where Alan Old (and some other well known names) assisted. The results of numerous studies ranging in geographical location from North Africa to the Arctic areas of northern Finland are drawn upon, and hypotheses tested – and, particularly, compared. Given this wide range of source material, the authors' findings are in no way constricted and the demands of scientific verity, as the authors point out, increased their own study period over that originally intended.

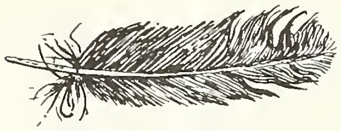
The book is divided into some 14 Chapters dealing systematically with topics such as Taxonomy and Distribution, Nesting, Habitat and Breeding Densities, Foraging Techniques and Diet, Breeding time and Clutch Size, Longevity, Age at First Breeding and Dispersal, Song and Mating Systems. Each chapter is concluded with a useful Summary of its contents.

9 Appendices cover matters such as Diet, breeding Data in tabular form, Return Rates in Different Parts of Europe, Male Plumage Colouration, and Polyterritoriality Distances.

At the risk of seeming patronizing, this reviewer found particularly pleasing the readable and, in the age of the omitted comma and the singular verb with plural subject, accurate style of the authors. The text is complemented by many graphs and histograms with only a few of which might the amateur of limited statistical capacity find difficulty. Some cheerful sketches illustrate points not suitable for statistical or tabular treatment. The lively drawings of Tomas Pärt animate the text and for the most part show the birds as "doing something", rather than as the subjects of portrait vignettes. The few photographs well illustrate the points they are intended to emphasize and the high standard of production we have come to take for granted from the Poyser press is fully upheld.

The authors state that their aim has been to appeal to enthusiastic amateurs as well as professional scientists. I would imagine that they will have succeeded. No one, amateur or professional, with an interest in the Pied Flycatcher, or perhaps in passerines in general, will wish to be without this attractively produced book. To the amateur it is much more than just an interesting read, and is one which will surely suggest new lines of study or explain some otherwise unclear results. The professional will find a comprehensive review and distillation of material drawn from many sources and with applications beyond the field of Pied Flycatcher research alone. A worthy study of this classic little bird. Please will someone now write a modern book on Redstarts!

Henry Robb



Seasons With the Kestrel *by Gordon Riddle Blandford; 1992; 160pp; £16.95; ISBN 0 7137 6.*

In this book, Gordon Riddle has brought together the results of almost twenty years of his own fieldwork on all aspects of the Kestrel's lifecycle. An introductory chapter summarises the Ayrshire scene – the author is Principal of Culzean Country Park in that District – and defines his objective. Initially, this was to collect as much information, past and present, as possible, to build up an overall picture of distribution, density and breeding performance in Ayrshire; then to monitor a sample of territories throughout the year, to discover, as far as possible, what factors affect the Kestrel's breeding performance. The monitoring aspect covered the years from 1979 to 1990, resulting in 400 territories known, 1,350 nest records completed, and over 1,000 Kestrels ringed. That so much information was gleaned was due, in no small measure, to Gordon Riddle's band of dedicated assistants in the field, to whom he gives generous credit. Also, it is obvious that he enjoys very cordial relationships with the landowners, shepherds and foresters with whom he comes into contact.

The results of this exercise are presented in eight chapters taking us through the Kestrel's year, from visiting territories to check occupation, through to fledging and dispersal. Written in a mixture of straightforward reporting, diary extracts and anecdotes, the whole makes for a pleasant and informative read. The final chapter, "The Twentieth-Century Raptor", provides a wider perspective on the Kestrel and its, and other raptors', future.

Inserted throughout the book are "informative windows" which present general information on the Kestrel, e.g. description, diet, status etc, and on Voles and Barn Owls, among other species connected with the Kestrel. The author's own excellent photographs are used throughout, many illustrating points of information or interest brought up in the text. Appendices indicate the status of the Kestrel in 25 European countries, list birds and mammals taken as prey, and provide a "site register" describing the territories and nest sites mentioned in the text. An extensive bibliography completes the volume.

Not a monograph, but a very readable and informative account of the Kestrel's life-style; just the present for a "raptor-man".

Euan Cameron

In Search of Arctic Birds *by Richard Vaughan; illustrated by Gunnar Brusewitz; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1992; 431 pp; £20.00; ISBN 0 85661 071 2.*

Here is a book which every Scottish ornithologist or birder who goes to the Arctic should have high on his reading list, alongside Malcolm Ogilvie's 'The Winter Birds' and Bryan Sage's 'The Arctic and Its Wildlife'. The author approaches his subject as an historian and gives us an immense amount of information about the early explorers in the last century who collected eggs and shot birds to study their anatomy and plumage carefully. Thanks to their efforts we hardly ever need to do this today. He mentions an amazing number of relevant papers by international writers, mainly from the pages of Ibis, both in the text and in the list of references at the end. But inevitably one can notice omissions. In the Canadian Arctic, Tom Manning produced many more than the one paper mentioned in the 1930s and 40s. The author discusses Adam Watson's work on Pat Baird's 1953 expedition to Baffin Island but not V. Wynne-Edwards' research on Baird's 1950 expedition. The Joint Services Expeditions to Princess Marie Bay in 1980 and to Borup Fiord in 1988 had very useful ornithological inputs. In Greenland, George Waterston contributed greatly in the 1960s and David Cabot recently.

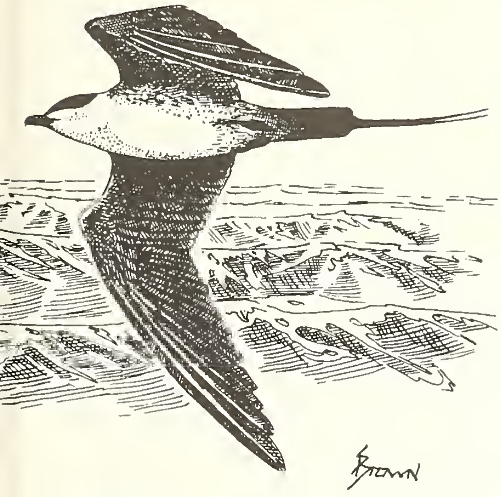
His chapter on Arctic Siberia and the offshore islands is particularly helpful now that the area is being opened up to westerners. But in his jump from an historical chapter to a Siberian geographical chapter the important contribution of William Bruce, with William Eagle Clarke, to the early knowledge of birds on Franz Josef Islands is lost. Bruce was Naturalist on the last year of Jackson's expedition, 1894-7. The six regional Arctic ornithologies published since the Second World War listed by Vaughan in Table 14 are all held at 21 Regent Terrace except the Russian one.

The author does not describe every bird, species by species, but he writes, in effect, fascinating essays on several: Snowy Owls, Gyrfalcon, Ptarmigan, Brünnich's Guillemots, that most elusive bird, Ross' Gull, and others. He certainly mentions every bird which has flown anywhere near the Arctic, and includes some delightful behaviour descriptions, in one case quoting Seton Gordon. His last two chapters, headed 'The Birdwatcher's Arctic, where to go and how to get there', and 'Conservation', to a certain degree conflict. Does he want to encourage birdwatchers to go to the best areas or does he not? This is a problem which will raise its head more and more in the future as a rising number of people become interested in specialised birds of remote regions and can afford to travel there to observe them. I could add to his list of places in Greenland, North Canada and Svalbard which are rich in birdlife but instead will simply recommend readers to write to the firm Arcturus Expeditions in Gartocharn who run well-organised and well-led trips taking small groups to the right places. The best shipping companies do not allow their captains to sound off their hooters near bird-cliffs nowadays (page 341) and indeed my experience of guided tours is that their members are more careful not to disturb birds than are many scientists! Greenland's municipal councils are becoming surprisingly modernised in their rules nowadays as can be seen from their placing of dustbins in towns, their rules re alcohol consumption, and their understanding of conservation matters. Their lovely picture of a while-tailed eagle on posters at Post Offices, with the words, 'Nagtoralik, Inutiguk', meaning 'Let him live' (not shown in this book) could well be copied in our own country.

This wonderful book has 73 top-class (black and white) photographs, mostly by the author, including a remarkable one of a Pomarine Skua mobbing a Snowy Owl. It also has no fewer than 40 maps, many charming drawings by Gunnar Brusewitz, 24 pages of references, a list of scientific names of birds mentioned in the text (some of which are not truly Arctic, which the author admits) and an Index.

I strongly commend this book to anyone who dreams of the Far North.

Angus Erskine



Long-tailed Skua *S Brown*

The Birds of Islay

Including where and when to find them

by

Malcolm Ogilvie

A completely new guide containing descriptions of habitats and the top bird-watching localities. Also a bird calendar and a full systematic list of all 266 species ever recorded with details of status and the times of year when all the regular ones are most likely to be seen. Illustrated with maps and line drawings.

Published 1992, price £3.50.
(Or £3.80 incl. p&p direct from the author at: Glencairn, Bruichladdich, Isle of Islay, PA49 7UN).

***Proceedings of the Third IWRB International Swan Symposium** Oxford 1989. Wildfowl Supplement Number 1. Jane Sears and Philip J Brown (Eds). The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, Slimbridge 1991. 400pp; numerous line drawings, figure and tables. £ . .*

December 1989 saw the gathering at Oxford, England, of swan specialists from all over the world to attend the Third International Swan Symposium convened by the IWRB. This special supplement to Wildfowl presents the proceedings of that Symposium. Data from 72 papers and posters are published but even this is not the sum total of work presented at the Symposium – the amount of research being undertaken worldwide on swans by dedicated amateur and professional fieldworkers is such that the Editors had to be selective in the inclusion of papers. The result is a very comprehensive indication of the commitment to the furtherance of the study and knowledge of almost all species of Swan throughout their respective ranges.

The report on the proceedings is preceded by two papers which admirably synthesise the findings and issues addressed through the Symposium. These are then followed by 7 sections dealing with various aspects of swan study; distribution and status, population studies, breeding, migration, habitats, food and feeding, biometrics, physiology and genetics, and management and conservation. A final paper presents the principal recommendations arising from the Proceedings which will no doubt provide the stimulus for even further work on swans prior to the Fourth International Symposium to be held in Odessa in 1994.

There seems little doubt from the variety of topics covered and the comprehensive nature of findings and presentation that the future of the world's swans will certainly not be influenced by a lack of data. Symposia provide an ideal opportunity for all workers in a specific field of study to meet, discuss and share particular problems and possible solutions. 130 swan biologists from 17 countries, including 12 delegates from the then USSR, attended the Symposium and these proceedings merely highlight both the level of co-operation which has developed between swan specialists throughout the world and the intensity of study aimed at securing the future of these birds. If you have the slightest interest in swans then this publication is essential reading as a pointer to how to develop your interest further.

Allan W & Lyndesay M Brown

***The Birds of Islay** by Malcolm Ogilvie; Lochindeal Press 1992; 48pp; £3.50.*

This small book contains a wealth of fascinating detail both on the species recorded on the island, the various habitats and the best birding localities. A must for anyone contemplating a visit. Copies are available at 21 Regent Terrace.

BIRD CENSUS TECHNIQUES

C.J. Bibby and N.D. Burgess
(Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, U.K.)
D.A. Hill
(Brititsh Trust for Ornithology, U.K.)

Wild birds are counted for a wide variety of reasons and by a bewildering array of methods. However, detailed descriptions of the techniques used and the rationale adopted are scattered in the literature and the newcomer to bird census work, or the experienced bird counter in search of a wider view, may well have difficulty in coming to grips with the subject as a whole. While not an end in itself, numerical and distributional census work is a fundamental part of many scientific and conservation studies and one in which the application of given standards is vital results are not to be distorted or applied in a misleading way.

This book provides a concise guide to the various census techniques and to the opportunities and pitfalls which each entails. The common methods are described in detail and illustrated through an abundance of diagrams showing examples of actual and theoretical census studies. Anyone with a bird census job to plan should be able to select the method best suited to the study in hand, and to apply it to best effect within the limits inherent in it and the constraints of the particular study.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the *British Trust for Ornithology* have for many years pioneered the collaboration of amateurs and professionals in various census studies. Three members of their staff, each with extensive field experience, now pool the knowledge of these investigations to lay the groundwork, for sound Census work in future years.
August 1992, £19.50 (tentative)
ISBN: 0-12-095830-9, 272 pp

***The Ancient Murrelet: A Natural History in the Queen Charlotte Islands** by Anthony J Gaston; illustrated by Ian Jones; T. & A.D. Poyser; 1992; 249 pp; £17.00; ISBN 0 85661 070 4.*

This monograph represents the publishers' first subject aimed specifically at the North American market, dealing as it does with a North Pacific seabird. It would be academic reading for British birders were it not for the amazing arrival of the Western Palearctic's first Ancient Murrelet off Lundy in May 1990 – a lone individual which has returned every April since!

As expected, the high Poyser standard of production is maintained, but it is also an extremely fascinating and readable work, with occasional humorous asides including a 'rhyme of the Ancient Murrelet' at the close of the book! The author has done an excellent job of describing the life story of this strange auk which sings in treetops, visits its colonies at night, and breeds in burrows yet rears its young entirely at sea.

The book is divided into two parts. The first describes the global status, distribution and history of the species, which inhabits remote islands in an arc from China and Japan through the Aleutians to Canada. Its annual life cycle and observations away from breeding colonies are also covered here. Part 2 is the meat of the book, with the author's long-term, and somewhat arduous, studies of the species on Reef Island in the Queen Charlotte group off British Columbia described in detail. After an introduction, the author discusses the island and the work, attendance and behaviour of breeders and non-breeders, behaviour at the offshore gathering grounds, the breeding habitat and burrows, the eggs and chicks, timing of breeding and its effects, population dynamics, theories concerning the precocity of the chicks, and conservation.

Although the climate and topography of the breeding grounds resemble those of western Scotland, we are not used to our seabirds colonising mature forests, which a number of North American seabirds seem to do (including other auks and also petrels). For that reason the story which unfolds is quite amazing. Each chapter has two useful summaries, one at the beginning giving the reader a brief résumé of the topics to be covered, and one at the end describing the chapter's salient points. Figures and tables are sprinkled liberally throughout, and are both informative and clear. However, I had to double-check on one or two, after references in the text sent me searching for data which were not there, and *vice versa*! May I also make a plea to publishers to ensure that graphs printed side-on are arranged so that the legend along the ordinate is not incongruously upside-down when the book is in its normal position (not a fault confined to this book). One of the very few textual errors that I detected states incorrectly that storms are brought about by major anticyclones.

I was half hoping that there would be a clue to the route taken by the Lundy vagrant, but I was disappointed. It joins the select pair of Pacific auks which have turned up previously in our longitudes, i.e. the Parakeet Auklet in Sweden in 1860 and the Crested Auklet off Iceland in 1912. The subject of this book has straggled to the eastern USA, but its wanderings remain as mysterious now as its biology was a few years ago before Tony Gaston and his colleagues set to work.

Minor criticisms apart, I would heartily recommend this Poyser, especially to all with a penchant for remote seabird colonies.

Norman Elkins

***Bird Population Studies: Relevance to Conservation and Management** Eds. C.M. Perrins, J-D. Lebreton and G.J.M. Hirons; Oxford Ornithology series, Oxford University Press, 1991; 683 pp; hardback; £50.00.*

This impressive volume arises from an International Symposium on the relevance of bird population studies to conservation and management held in the Camargue in December 1988. This meeting drew together leading researchers in the fields of avian population dynamics and conservation biology. The resulting volume is a welcome attempt to synthesise the state of the art with regards to studies of avian demography and the application of such studies to management problems, particularly in relation to conservation.

The book is divided into five main sections. The first three chapters, headed "The Comparative Approach", cover population regulation in raptors, demographic characteristics of Australian passerines, and features of insular bird faunas in the Mediterranean. There follow two, necessarily mathematical, chapters on methods of estimation of demographic parameters and the modelling of avian population dynamics.

The third section, headed "The Species Approach", encompasses nine somewhat disparate chapters. These include case studies of aspects of population dynamics of relevance to conservation for species ranging from Great Tits and Song Sparrows to Snow Geese, White Storks, Puffins and Greater Flamingos. There are also two wider ranging chapters on seabird demography plus one which discusses general constraints on avian demographic parameters and the implications of these for conservation management.

"Further Issues" covers a range of topics of importance to conservation such as the distribution of birds among habitats, the requirements of migratory waterfowl for high quality feeding grounds on passage, and the influence of parasites and toxic chemicals on populations. This section also includes a chapter on the population dynamics of Grey Partridges, which might more logically have been placed in the preceding section.

The "Species Management" section contains six chapters on the impact of various avian pest control management policies such as gull culls, the harvesting of North American waterfowl populations, and habitat conservation for Florida Scrub Jays and Northern Spotted Owls. This final section ends with two review chapters on overall conservation priorities for threatened bird species world-wide and on the relevance of population studies to conservation. The whole volume is ably wrapped up by Ian Newton's concluding remarks.

Barring minor quibbles about the ordering of chapters, the book is well structured and nicely produced with numerous explanatory figures and tables. It should, ideally, grace the shelves of all ornithologists concerned with conservation management. The price may be a little daunting, but represents good value for such a weighty ornithological text which is certain to be widely consulted.

Kate Thompson

All cassettes and discs are available from: Wildsounds, PO Box 309, West Byfleet, Surrey KT14 7YA.

***"All the Bird Songs of Britain & Europe"** by J C Roché; set of 4 cassettes £33.95 incl. p.&p. (UK).*

This set of 4 cassettes is intended to be used in conjunction with "Collin's New Generation Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe" by C Perrins and covers 420 species, 24 more than the CD production. J C Roché, with the help of 50 contributors, has managed very successfully to represent the majority of species throughout this high quality production. There are excellent recordings of not only songs but also calls and alarm calls of most species and even examples of mimicry from such birds as Marsh Warbler, Jay and Whinchat.

The cassettes come in a handy plastic pack suitable for easy storage in the home or car door pocket and therefore a worthwhile aid to take along on trips in Britain or to other parts of Europe. Within the pack there is a small booklet containing the text. This is concise and well laid out with each species numbered and named in French, English and Latin. There is a short description of how each species is represented, this corresponding to the spoken introduction on the tape.

I would strongly recommend this set of cassettes to anyone interested in learning new bird songs, as a memory aid at the beginning of the breeding season or just for the pleasure of listening to this smooth production.

Wendy Mattingley

***"Nocturnal and Diurnal Birds of Prey"** by J C Roché; Cassette £7.95 incl. p&p.*

This is another good production by J C Roché of the songs and calls of 40 species of West European birds of prey, all on one cassette. On side one, 27 diurnal raptors are divided into groups of small, medium and large and on side two, 13 owl species are represented in the small and large categories.

Each species is not only introduced on the tape but there is also commentary explaining the types of call or song you are about to hear. This allows the text to be limited to just the English and Latin name of the bird and its playing order on the tape.

One criticism was the lack of examples of the repertoire of calls of species such as Merlin, Sparrowhawk, Marsh Harrier and Eleonora's Falcon. Most other diurnal raptors are however well represented but obviously the owls, having been given a complete side for 13 species, have more space for a larger variety of calls.

Two other minor points were noted. Firstly, the recording level differs throughout the tape and therefore the volume has to be turned down on occasions, particularly if you usually enjoy having the volume high! Secondly, the first call in the Kestrel sequence is surely a Merlin?

Nevertheless this is still a well-produced and informative tape and is a good buy for anyone with a general interest in birds of prey.

Wendy Mattingley

***"All the Bird Songs of Britain and Europe"** by J C Roché; set of 4 compact discs £49.95 or £12.99 each + p.&p.*

In his introduction, Roché says he took care to select only high quality recordings for this collection. It shows. All the tracks are clear and noise is minimal. Shut your eyes and you can almost see the bird (as well as the one or two in the background!).

These four CDs cover 396 species (99 on each) and include most of the common and breeding species. This allows about 45 seconds for each, on average (in practice, they vary from 20 seconds to over a minute); some recordings are therefore rather brief.

Few rarities feature, so this compilation is smaller than previous West Palearctic collections. However, for me there were still one or two surprises. For example, the amazing "fog horn" call of Andalusian Hemipode!

A minor quibble from some commentators is the lack of precise background information (eg, subspecies or location). However, where local "dialects" exist these are mentioned.

One advantage of CD is the availability to select any track by typing in its two-digit code. This saves time and allows rapid access to any species for taping or use in the field. A random-selection feature will also provide the user with an instant "quiz" for self-testing.

To sum up, this collection is utterly evocative. Certainly CD is the best medium for popular presentation of bird calls and songs. I can't wait for more!.

Chris McGuigan

"British Birds"

Many members no doubt already subscribe to "British Birds", the doyen of bird magazines. It is worth reminding others, however, that SOC members are entitled to a reduced subscription of 25% below the normal price.

Birdwatcher's Yearbook and Who's Who

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook has over the years of its publication become an indispensable part of the birdwatcher's library, and has been described with justice as the ornithologist's "Wisden". It is now to be joined by a "Who's Who" of the ornithological world. This new reference book will also be produced by Buckingham Press and looks likely to be as useful as its fellow-publication.

Red Kites

As part of the NCC/RSPB re-introduction programme a further 24 red kites have been released in the Scottish highlands this summer. *Please notify RSPB Highland Office immediately of any sightings by telephone if possible. Tel: 0463 715000.*

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to *Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office.*

200 Club

It is marvellous to report that almost all of last year's members renewed their subscription for the 'year' which started on 1 June. A very warm "thank you" to all of you for continuing to support the SOC this way. If you are one of the few who did not renew, you can still send your subscription for 1992/93. Some new members have joined and we welcome more. Simply send £9 (for the nine months – September to May inclusive) to me and I will acknowledge its receipt; please make a cheque payable to 'SOC 200 Club'. If you would like to pay by Banker's Order please let me know and I will send you a form, see SBN:26 for my address.

At present the prizes are £30, £20 and £10 every month; £50 in November and May and also, in November, £100. The more members, the more in prizes and to the SOC for refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace.

Winners for the second quarter of 1992 were: –

April: 1st £30 – A. Shepherd, Arbroath; 2nd £20 – Dr E. Tennant, Glasgow; 3rd £10 – Dr M.A. Keith, Edinburgh.

May: 1st £50 – Mrs M. Kerrod, Bowden; 2nd £30 – R.S. Craig, Peebles; 3rd £20 – M.J. Bickmore, Selkirk; 4th £10 – Miss J. Banks, Forres.

June: 1st £30 – T. McGeorge, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 – Miss M.H. Knox, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – Miss S.E. Horsburgh, Peebles.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

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SOC Notices

Scottish Birds Records Committee Election of New Member

In 1990 S.B.R.C. commenced a rotation with one member now retiring each year. Alan Brown is due to stand down in November 1992 and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Pete Gordon, R.S.P.B. Conservation Officer for Lothian and Borders and S.O.C. Local Recorder for East Lothian.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 15th October 1992, being signed by both a proposer and a seconder who must both be S.O.C. members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all S.O.C. Local recorders will be eligible to vote.

Ron Forrester, Secretary, S.B.R.C., 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD.

Subscriptions

As agreed at last November's AGM subscription rates are to be increased this year, and as subscriptions are due on 1st October a renewal form indicating the new rates is enclosed with this issue. This is the first subscription increase since 1988 and rates still compare favourably with other organisations. If you pay by Bankers Order it would be helpful if you could return the completed Bankers Order to me as soon as possible. If you do not pay by Bankers Order perhaps you would consider doing so now, and help to reduce administration costs.

Sylvia Laing

Annual Report, Winter Syllabus 1992/93, Conference Booking Form and Renewal Form

All these should be enclosed with this issue of SBN, if not please contact 21 Regent Terrace.

SOC Photo Competition

Entries for this year's photo competition to be organised by Angus Hogg and Don Smith should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace by **23rd October 1992 at the latest.** Acknowledgements will be sent to all entrants and photos returned by us during November.

Thanks to

Rosemary Davidson and Norma Wilson for helping to pack the June issue of SBN; with their help it was all packed in one day.

Recent Reports

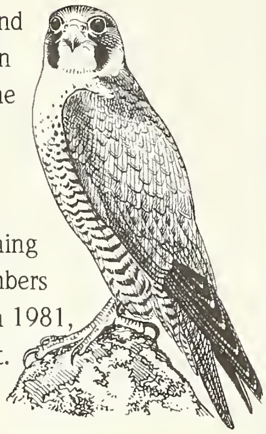
Please accept our apologies for recent reports not being included in this issue; unfortunately they were not received in time for our printing deadline.

In 1963 there were only 400 occupied Peregrine territories in Britain, but now . . . .

British Trust for Ornithology

They are back –

but not in all parts of Scotland



Toxic chemicals poisoned Peregrines and caused the females to lay eggs with thin shells. Adults died and eggs broke in the nest, causing the population crash discovered by BTO members.

The BTO survey results led to the banning of these deadly poisons. Peregrine numbers increased to 800 occupied territories in 1981, and to at least 1050 in 1991 as a result.

With the Raptor Study Groups, we have found that in the remoter parts of north–west Scotland only half of the eyries occupied in 1962 now hold Peregrines. This may relate to contamination of the seabirds that form an important part of the Peregrine's diet in those areas.

The Peregrine survey is just one of a whole range of surveys organised by the BTO. There are projects in which you can participate whether you are a beginner or an expert. You can get involved directly with today's major conservation issues with the BTO. And if fieldwork is not for you, help us with your subscription.

- **Join before September 5 and we'll give you a £70 discount off a pair of Leica full–size binoculars.**
- **Join during October and we'll give you three months free membership**

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Join the BTO – *today!*

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Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC
Printed by Ritchie of Edinburgh, 163 Bonnington Road, Edinburgh EH6 5RE

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THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish
Bird News

DECEMBER 1992 No. 28
ISSN 0268-3200

Edited by Sylvia Laing and
Michael Murphy

SMITHSONIAN
JAN 27 1993
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1992/93 Survey of breeding waders on Scottish agricultural land

You may recall from previous Newsletters that the SOC and RSPB are jointly organising a survey of breeding waders on non-upland areas of Scotland. The objectives of this survey are threefold –

a) to estimate the total population of breeding waders on non-upland areas within Scotland.
b) to identify and survey key sites for breeding waders on non-upland areas.
c) to record the change in wader numbers on sites covered in both this survey and a previous survey undertaken in 1982/83 (also organised by the SOC).

The aim of this report is to let you know how the project is progressing and to explain what we hope to do in the second year of the project.

a) Numbers of Breeding waders on non upland Scotland

This part of the project was undertaken by employees of the RSPB. We used the Macauley Land Capability Classification System to determine what was an upland site within Scotland. Prior to selecting the sites for survey, we mapped the location of each of c200 keysites (see later). We randomly selected 240 100 hectare squares from the non-upland, non keysites part of Scotland. All squares from mainland Scotland and the Inner Hebrides were available for inclusion – we intend to cover the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles next summer.

The results from this survey are included in Table 1. As can be seen Lapwing was the most numerous species – although both Oystercatcher and Curlew were recorded in more squares. Snipe and Redshank were far less common – being recorded in just 16 and 9 percent of squares respectively.

How does this compare with other large scale surveys of breeding waders? Table 2 gives approximate wader densities from other surveys. None of these surveys are directly comparable in that none are based on surveying exactly the same types of habitats.

Nevertheless it can be seen that there are considerably higher densities of both Oystercatchers and Curlew in Scotland than elsewhere. Lapwing densities are also higher than those in other general surveys, and similar to densities on the BTO's habitat specific lowland wet grassland survey. Snipe and Redshank densities are higher on wet grasslands in England and Wales – although both species are absent from much of the rest of the farmland in central and lowland England.

Oystercatcher *David Hassell*
The wader which was recorded in most squares during the current survey.

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF PAIRS OF BREEDING WADERS ON AREAS ON NON-UPLAND IN SCOTLAND

	RANDOMLY SELECTED SITES				KEY SITES		
	Total (No. Prs)	Average Density (Pr/100Ha)	Percent of Squares with birds	Max. No. Pairs in one square	Total (No.Prs)	Average Density (Pr/100Ha)	Maximum Density (Pr/100Ha)
Oystercatcher	465	2.0	58	14	634	5.7	17.5
Lapwing	550	2.3	52	36	1508	13.6	51.8
Snipe	174	0.7	16	10	616	5.5	60.5
Curlew	329	1.4	55	10	524	4.7	20.7
Redshank	33	0.1	9	4-5	592	5.3	28.7

238 squares were surveyed for the random survey (access refused to 2 squares).
114 sites so far returned for the keysites survey.
The number of drumming Snipe recorded has been multiplied by 1.74 to give an estimate of the total number of pairs (Green 1985).

b) Indentification and Survey of Key Sites from Breeding Waders in Scotland

At the start of the project I contacted RSPB conservation officers, NCCS (now SNH) area officers, BTO regional reps and SOC regional organisers and asked each of them to list sites that they considered to be important for breeding waders within their areas. To all of you who responded many thanks. This has resulted in a list of about 200 key sites throughout mainland Scotland. The aim has been to get these sites surveyed by volunteers. To date (early October) I have received completed survey forms for 114 sites – I believe about another 30 or 40 sites have been surveyed, although the results haven't yet been forwarded to me. If you haven't sent your data in by the time you read this then please do so as soon as possible. I shall attempt to get coverage next year for all sites not already surveyed.

Snipe eggs & chick *Bobby Smith*
The first chick to hatch sits snugly protected in its camouflage.

TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF WADER DENSITIES ON LARGE SCALE SURVEYS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

	Oystercatcher	Lapwing	Snipe	Curlew	Redshank
Present Survey	2.0	2.3	0.4	1.4	0.1
Scotland 1983	1.0	3.0	1.1	0.8	0.2
BWWM	0.3	2.7	0.8	0.2	0.9
N. Ireland	–	0.4	0.7	0.4	0.0
BTO Lapwing, National		0.7			
North		1.7			

Data from
1) Scotland 1983 Survey – Galbraith, Furness & Fuller (1984)
2) BWWM Survey – O'Brien & Smith (in press)
3) N. Ireland Survey – Partridge (1988)
4) BTO Lapwing Survey – Shrubb & Lack (1991)

The 114 sites so far returned cover about 110 Km2 (mean site size of 101 hectares, ranging from 5 to 490 hectares) of non-upland Scotland. Table 1 gives some basic information about the number of pairs of breeding waders recorded on these sites. 10 sites recorded 15 pairs or more of Oystercatcher, 9 sites had 40 pairs or more of Lapwing, 8 sites had 10 or more drumming Snipe, 11 sites had 10 or more pairs of Curlew and 15 sites had 10 or more pairs of Redshank.

Table 3 lists those sites where high numbers of more than one species of wader were recorded. The density of breeding waders on the Insh marshes is comparable with some of the best lowland grassland sites in England and Wales. The contrast in management undertaken at Insh marshes compared with the goose grazing marshes on Loch Gruinart is reflected in the species composition at the different reserves – the tall fen vegetation of the Insh marches being particularly favoured by Snipe and Curlew – whilst the short grass of Loch Gruinart provides ideal conditions for breeding Lapwing. The Watermeetings site forms part of a large area of the Upper Clyde surveyed in the 1980's by Alan Wood and colleagues. Wader numbers for the area as a whole were comparable with some of the large lowland grassland sites in England and Wales – such as the Norfolk Broads and the Somerset Levels.

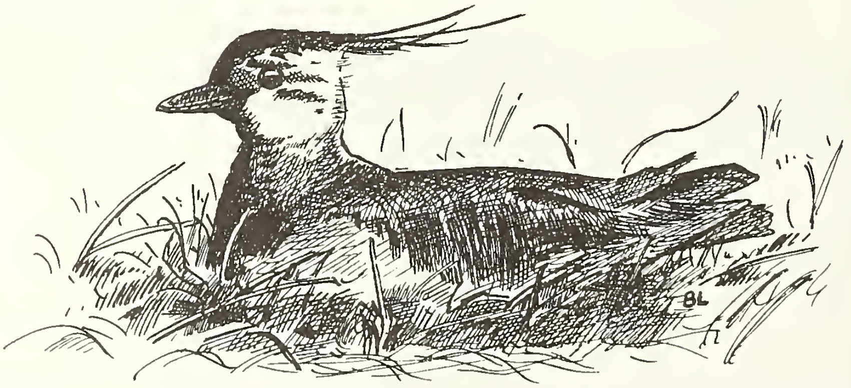
c) Change in Wader Numbers between surveys

This is the least satisfactory part of the project to date. The main reason for this is that we have still not managed to find the 1982/83 dataset. If you have sent in information on a site that you first surveyed in 1982/83 then it would be extremely useful if your could let me know how many waders you recorded in 1982/83.

Alternatively, if you made a visit to a site in 1982/83 and still have the results then please get in touch with me and I'll see if I can get it covered. To date 10 people have managed to provide me with information on wader numbers in both the early 1980's (between 1982 and 1984) and again in 1992. The results are in Table 4. Obviously the numbers involved are much too low to make any firm conclusions. The main point of the table is to show how little quantitative information is available on how wader numbers have changed in Scotland.

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF PAIRS OF BREEDING WADERS ON SOME OF THE BEST SCOTTISH NON-UPLAND SITES

Site	Area (Km$_2$)	Oystercatcher	Lapwing	Snipe	Curlew	Redshank
Insh Marshes	8.5	59	95	221	129	155
Cluny Farm (Spey)	1.4	16	43	31	11	22
Allan/Knaick	2.9	49	149	10	1	43
Glen Clova	1.4	22	73	10	6	11
Loch Gruinart	4.9	9	232	24	14	75
U. Kelvin Valley	2.6	5	45	23	9	20
Watermeetings (Clyde)	2.5	30	30	12	13	23



Lapwing *Barry Larking*
The most numerous species recorded.

Plans for next season

The main task for next summer will be to complete surveys on all remaining key sites. Hopefully this will not be too great a problem as we've already covered more than half of them. If you fancy surveying one of these sites then please don't hesitate to contact me.

Secondly we hope to get some more up-to-date information on numbers of breeding waders in the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. Again, if you're interested in surveying sites in any of these areas then please let me know. With all this information together we should be able to come up with the most accurate estimate of numbers of breeding waders in non-upland Scotland to date.

Thirdly some more information on wader numbers on sites previously surveyed would be extremely helpful.

Finally, if you know of a site you consider should be included as a key site then please get in touch.

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Mark O'Brien
RSPB
17 Regent Terrace
Edinburgh

TABLE 4. CHANGE IN NUMBERS OF BREEDING WADERS IN SCOTLAND

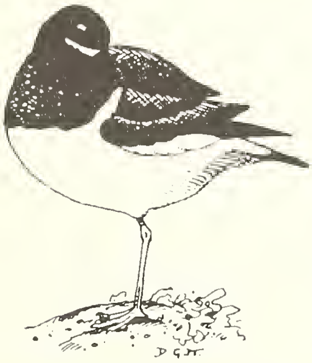
	No. Sites	1982-1984	1992
Oystercatcher	9	23	30
Lapwing	10	78	63
Snipe	5	17	9
Curlew	7	26	27
Redshank	7	13	13

10 sites available for comparison.

No. Sites gives the number of sites where the wader species was recorded in one or both of the years.

Early 80's – number of waders surveyed in one of 1982, 1983 or 1984 summed for all sites.

1992 – number of waders on same site in 1992 summed for all sites.



Oystercatcher *David Mitchell*

Insh Marshes

In SBN 23 and 26, we reported on the progress of plans for flood control in Badenoch. The importance of getting it right has been underlined by the figures now available on breeding birds in the Insh Marshes. These reveal the marshes on the R. Spey to be the most important site for breeding waterfowl in Scotland.

A survey carried out there this summer showed a record total of 712 breeding pairs of waders and 495 breeding pairs of duck. The overall density of 128 pairs of waterfowl per square kilometre has confirmed the site as mainland Scotland's most important wetland. Hopefully any decision about flood control will take this into account, and the necessary measures will be limited to embankments and road raising to protect local homes.

Redshank *Brian Turner*
One of the breeding species which seems to have diminished over the last few years. It is to be hoped that the survey which Mark describes above will serve to identify the problems which exist and thus how this can be tackled effectively. The more data, the better - so get out there counting!

The menace of low-flying aircraft to seabirds on Ailsa Craig

Recent efforts to improve the lot of breeding seabirds on Ailsa Craig by removing predaceous rats has proved very successful. Many species now enjoy a successful breeding season and those which do not, such as Kittiwakes, have their breeding failure sea-based rather than land-based. However it is now clear that low-flying aircraft can and do cause the mass mortality of certain seabird species.

Ailsa Craig is unique amongst Gannetries in that there is a boulder-beach surrounding the island. At virtually every other colony the birds nest directly above the sea. When species like Razorbill and Guillemots fledge, they have to time their leap to the sea, and the waiting parent bird, to coincide with tidal conditions. When young Gannets fledge, they are able to flutter and glide sufficiently well to ensure a sea landing. The timing of fledging is therefore critical and premature fledging usually leads to death.

Birds breeding on islands such as Ailsa are susceptible to disturbance by low-flying aircraft. The adult of species such as Gannet react by flying off the nest leaving the egg or small chick exposed and unprotected to the mercy of gulls which seem more conditioned to accepting such events. Normally one parent Gannet always remains with the chick, and only a very few "specialist" gulls manage to steal eggs. Auks usually react to aircraft by rapidly leaving the ledges, knocking eggs and young alike to the rocks below. Where young are near to fledging they become excited and simply are panicked from the ledges to their death.

Disturbance from English-based American F111 jet fighters, over the past few years has often caused such seabird mortalities. The Marquess of Ailsa, who owns the island, petitioned the Royal Air Force, on my behalf, to have Ailsa designated an "exclusion zone" for low-flying aircraft. The RAF readily agreed to this proposal and decreed that planes must not come closer than half a nautical mile and 2,000 feet above the summit, which in turn is 1114 ft above sea level.

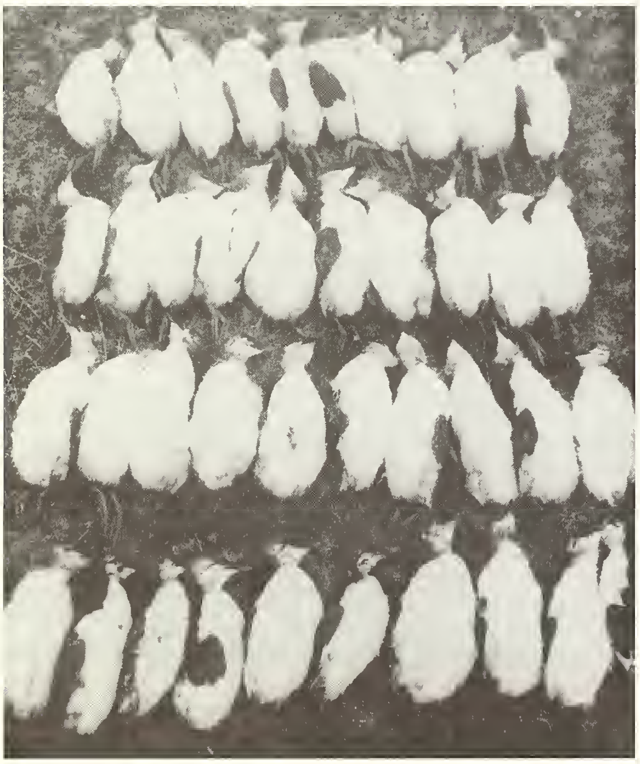
Breaches of the RAF regulations ocurred during 1992 which had catastrophic effects on Gannets and Auks. The first happened on June 17th when a giant Hercules transport aircraft (its number clearly visible) made no fewer than eight successive flights directly above the island at an altitude of about 200 ft above the summit. This resulted in scattering the entire Gannet colony for about an hour in total, allowing mass predation by gulls. I estimated some 2,000 or more Gannets lost their egg or small chick during the escapade. The RAF Air Police investigated the incident and traced the American crew to a German airbase. Apologies have been proffered and it is hoped that such an incident will never happen again.

The second major incident happened when a light aircraft from a training school at Prestwick made a single low pass on 22nd July. On this occasion no fewer than 123 young auks, mainly Guillemots, were panicked from the ledges to their death. I collected 40 corpses for examination, and all had head or body injuries. The flying school promised to keep clear of the island in future.

Ailsa appears to act as a magnet for sight-seeing pilots, most of whom are probably unaware of the damage they cause. While it is possible to document such events on Ailsa Craig there must be many other colonies where chicks and eggs simply fall into the sea and are never noticed.

Birdwatchers witnessing such events should make them more widely known. Low-flying over remote islands has been going on for years. The damage such episodes cause, not only to sea-birds, requires more documentation.

Bernard Zonfrillo



40 corpses of almost-fledged Guillemot chicks panicked to their death by low flying aircraft over Ailsa Craig on 22nd July 1992.

Guillemots *Bernard Zonfrillo*

Wigeon
Endowment Fund grants have helped Wigeon studies in Upper Deeside.

Endowment Fund Grants

The Club's Endowment Fund has two principal objectives:

a) to support studies to further knowledge of birds of Scotland.

b) to contribute to the conservation of birds of Scotland.

It is available only for amateur survey/fieldwork projects; individuals, groups and SOC Branches can apply for grant aid from the fund. Projects must relate to work on Scottish birds and the fund is particularly valuable towards meeting reasonable revenue costs of a project.

Between £1500-£2500 is available from the fund most years and although no upper limit is applied to grant award all applications are treated on their merits; an award will be dependent upon the funds available balanced against other worthy applications. Grants for up to 3 years can be awarded to encourage longer term projects. All awards of grant are subject to the submission of a short report on the project results and "continuing" grants will not be paid until such reports have been received.

A leaflet on the Fund and application form can be obtained from the Club Secretary at 21, Regent Terrace. Given the late appearance of this note the **closing date for 1993 applications is 31st January 1993:** normally the closing date would be 31st October.

Only 3 new applications were submitted and approved in 1992 – Wigeon breeding biology in Upper Deeside (£100), Sule Skerry Seabird Studies (£100) and a Fife Goose study (£80 per annum for 3 years). Hopefully 1993 will see an increase in demand for support from the fund – if nothing else to make the S&R Committee work a little harder! Applications will be considered by the Committee in February and reported to Council for approval in March 1993.

Allan W. Brown
Chairman
Surveys & Research Committee

On a happier note

More than 100 young Ospreys were raised in Scotland this summer - the highest number for more than two centuries. Round-the-clock surveillance of particularly vulnerable nest sites has helped deter some egg collectors: in previous year up to a quarter of all eggs laid were stolen.

Black-throated Divers have also done well this year, thanks to the aid of artificial rafts providing safe islands to nest on (see SBN 26 June 1992).

The new RSPB reserve on Coll has shown an increase in the number of calling male Corncrakes from 4 in 1991 to 10 in 1992. This species is unfortunately in sharp decline nationwide and it is very encouraging to note an increase on Coll, where sensitive farming methods are in operation.

A record number of Red-necked Phalaropes bred on the RSPB's Fetlar reserve this year. The Shetland reserve now contains well over 90% of the British population of this lovely little wader.

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Request for Information

A note from Alan Knox on behalf of the British Ornithologists' Union, requesting information about the Wood Duck.

Wood Duck Aix sponsa was added to Category D (now D4) in 1971, as it was unclear whether or not feral birds nesting in southern England had established self-sustaining populations. The position was reviewed in 1972 and 1978 and the species retained in Category D on each occasion. The Committee would welcome comments on the present status of Wood Duck in the wild in Britain, particularly any information, positive or negative, on recent breeding records and success and of known releases and escapes. The Committee is also aware that a Wood Duck ringed in North Carolina, USA, was subsequently shot in the Azores, and would welcome details of records which may relate to genuinely wild individuals in Britain, Information should be sent to Tim Inskipp. 219c Huntingdon Road. Cambridge CB3 ODL.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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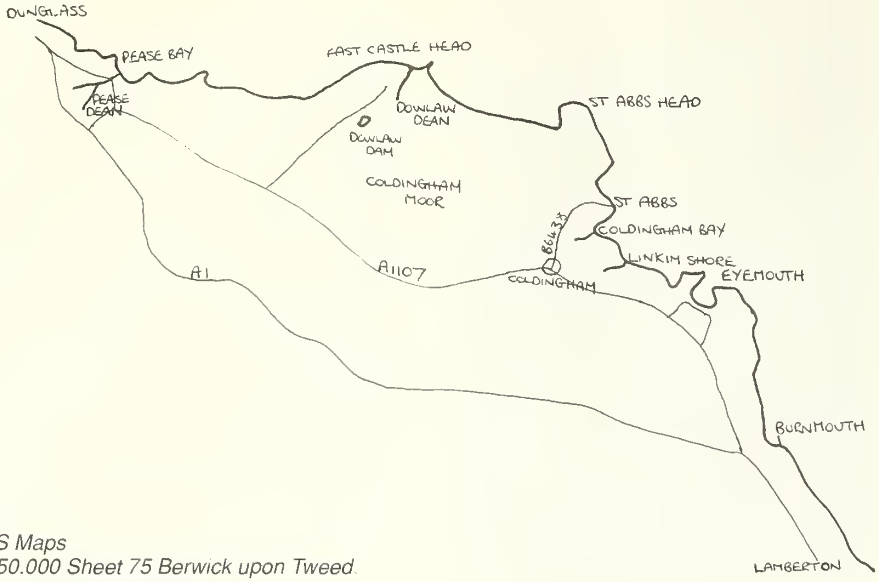
Birdwatching on the Berwickshire Coast

When people think of Border country. the coast isn't the first thing that comes to mind. That's a mistake! for what it lacks in quantity. it certainly makes up for in quality and the Berwickshire coast is as exciting as any stretch of coastline on mainland Britain both for its scenic beauty and outstanding birdwatching.



OS Maps
1:50.000 Sheet 75 Berwick upon Tweed.
1:50.000 Sheet 67 Duns and Dunbar.

The coastline stretches for roughly 40km from Lamberton in the south to the boundary with East Lothian at Dunglass. It is principaly a rocky coast with high cliffs rising up to 150m. a few sandy bays and several scrubby or wooded deans penetrating inland. There are no mudflats or saltmarsh.

Spring means the arrival of the coast's greatest wildlife asset - its breeding seabirds. Well over one hundred thousand nest on the cliffs, principally Kittiwakes and Guillemots, with both having nationally important populations. There are also large numbers of Razorbills. Shags, Fulmars and Herring Gulls and small populations of Puffin and Cormorant. The majority of the seabirds are concentrated at St Abbs Head (NT915693) a rocky headland 5 miles north of Eyemouth which is a National Nature Reserve owned by the National Trust for Scotland and jointly managed with the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Here there is easy access to a variety of viewpoints overlooking the best cliffs. Other good places to view seabirds are the cliff path between Eyemouth and Burnmouth and around Fast Castle head (NT860711 take the Dowlaw road signposted off the A1107 to its end then carry on down a farm track to a small car park just beyond a row of cottages). Remember that the seabird season is a relatively short one and Guillemots are already leaving the cliffs by the end of June.

Peregrines also breed on the cliffs. taking advantage of the numerous feral pigeons and occassional seabird. Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are regularly encountered anywhere along the coast and Ravens. once a common bird. have recently recolonised the cliffs after an absence of forty years.

A good variety of small, open country birds breed including Whinchat, Wheatear, Yellowhammer and Linnet. Corn Buntings occur between Eyemouth and Burnmouth and where there is scrub in sheltered hollows or deans Reed Buntings. Whitethroats and sometimes Lesser Whitethroats breed.

The only substantial area of woodland is at Pease Dean (NT793704), a wildlife reserve owned by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Here there is a remnant Oak-Ash-Hazel woodland in a steep sided, Y-shaped valley. though it has been heavily interfered with by forestry operations including the planting of Sycamore and conifers. The long term management aims of the reserve are to restore native, deciduous woodland. Here there is a good network of paths giving easy access to view the excellent variety of woodland birds which includes Marsh Tit, approaching the northern limit of its distribution in the UK. Dippers and Grey Wagtails also nest here and Lesser Whitethroats sometimes breed. Park at the Pease Bay caravan site (NT794708) and enter the reserve by a kissing gate at the roadside.

The East coast can be a magic place in the periods of spring and autumn migration (April-May and mid August-October) and the Berwickshire coast is no exception. Large falls may occur in east or south-east winds especially if accompanied by overnight rain or poor visibility. St Abbs Head tends to be the focus of birdwatchers' attention because it is an ideal migrant trap due to its prominence and variety of habitats which includes a sheltered valley with a freshwater loch surrounded by trees and scrub. Here birds can find shelter and feeding before resuming their journeys. Large numbers of common migrants pass through especially Wheatears, Goldcrests, Warblers and Flycatchers. Rarities also occur on a regular basis - so far 1992 has produced King Eider. Red-footed Falcon, Golden Oriole. Red-backed Shrike, Barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler. Red- breasted Flycatcher and Little Bunting. However there are many other areas that are potentially very good but are rather neglected, for example. the steep valley down to Burnmouth harbour (NT 957612) which is well vegetated with a variety of trees and scrub, Linkim Shore and Fleurs Dean (NT924655) midway between Eyemouth and St Abbs, Milldown burn at Coldingham Bay (NT918663), Dowlaw Dean (NT867705) just to the south of Fast Castle Head and Pease Dean. All these places are well worth exploring during the migration periods and some of them have produced rarities in recent years, for example Icterine and Greenish Warblers at Burnmouth, Pallas's Warbler and Olive Backed Pipit at Coldingham Bay, Woodchat Shirke and Bluethroat at Dowlaw Dean.

Guillemot at St Abbs *Kevin Rideout*

Skelly Rocks St Abbs *Kevin Rideout*

The Berwickshire coast also offer good seawatching especially in strong north or north-east winds between August and September, though there can be good movements of Manx Shearwater in July in relatively light onshore winds. Arctic and Great Skuas pass close to shore and Sooty Shearwater are regularly seen. Sea duck, Divers, Terns and Gannets add variety and there is always the chance of a rarity such as Long-tailed Skua or Cory's Shearwater. St Abbs Head is a popular watch point either from the cliffs at the lighthouse or from a lower point called Black Gable about 400m south of the lighthouse (NT916690). In very strong winds it is possible to seawatch from a car parked in the lighthouse car park. If you prefer to be at sea level, try watching from the rocks at the end of the golf course on the south side of Eyemouth harbour (NT950646).

Even in the quieter winter period, the Berwickshire coast still has much to offer. Seawatching can still be rewarding with perhaps Little Auks, sea duck and Divers.

Divers and Grebes may occur in sheltered areas at Linkim shore, Coldingham Bay and Pease Bay while Turnstone and Purple Sandpiper can be found along the rocky shore. The area around Dowlaw and Coldingham Moor (NT850690) can produce Red Grouse, Peregrine, Merlin. Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier with large mixed flocks of Finches and Buntings which may include Twite, Lapland or Snow Bunting. The pond at Dowlaw Dam (NT852698) is a Greylag roost and may also have ducks and waders.

The Berwickshire coast offers great birdwatching in tremendous scenery; whatever the choice of site or time of year, it will not disappoint you.

General information: 'Birds of the Borders' a 125 page book, and annual Borders Bird reports are available from Ray Murray, 4 Bellfield Crescent, Eddleston, Tweeddale, Borders EH45 8RQ.

Kevin Rideout

Snow Bunting
A winter visitor to Berwickshire. *Alex Tewnion*

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Reviews

***The Herons of Europe** by Claire Voisin, T & A D Poyser 1991, 364pp. £22.50. ISBN O 85661 0631.*

This book is a most attractive recent addition to the Poyser series, reviewing much of the information on the behaviour and life histories of the 9 species of European herons. A brief introduction is followed by chapters on classification, the origins of herons, their general appearance and structure, breeding behaviour and biology, habitat and resource partitioning, feeding behaviour and foods. There follow individual chapters on each species covering appearance, distribution, movements and habitat, population size and trends, behaviour and biology. Two other chapters describe the worldwide population explosion of the Cattle Egret, and the protection afforded to herons in Europe.The work is thus impressively comprehensive in the topics reviewed, though it is mainly descriptive. There is only scant attempt to discuss functional aspects, new ideas are few, and new synthesis is all but absent.

The literature reviewed is nearly all pre-1985, and some seminal work is not quoted. For example there has been intense interest in, and much literature on, the functions of colonial breeding in birds; yet here only one hypothesis is presented - that of information transfer (p45). The important papers by Ward & Zahavi and by Krebs are not mentioned, nor are any of the subsequent papers that documented failed attempts to demonstrate information transfer at heronries. In a similar way the body of theory, and copious literature on the function of asynchronous hatching and sibling rivalry have also been ignored in favour of a short paragraph (p27). Nevertheless the book reviews many subjects well, including particularly good coverage of heron and egret display behaviour.

The book is well presented - interesting and easy to read - so an avid reader can learn rapidly. I like the sketches by Brusewitz, which are evocative of birds in the wild, and the line drawings by Suiro are precise illustrations, accurately portraying behaviour. Set against that is the annoying thinness of the leaves in recent Poyser books which means that good illustrations are marred by the lines of print showing through from adjacent pages. Perhaps it is only by such ploys that the price of these books remains reasonable. This book is remarkably cheap considering the wealth of information it contains and I had little hesitation in buying my own copy.

Mick Marquiss

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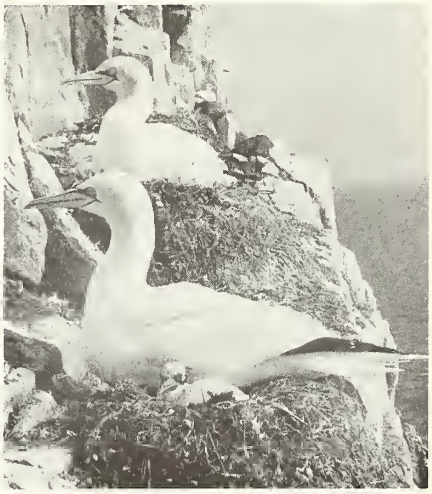
***Sula - The Seabird-hunters of Lewis.** John Beatty. Michael Joseph. London. 1992. 143pp. £IO. 99. ISBN 0 7181 3634 9*

This book sticks a knife into a rather tender spot. In 115 pages of grippingly evocative photographs and less than 26 of text Beatty depicts a guga-hunting trip to Sula Sgeir in 1991 with ten men from the Isle of Lewis. Since the 14th. century or before, Lewismen have crossed 40 miles of dangerous sea in open boats, to live for a fortnight, often in dire conditions, on this stormy rock whilst killing and salting young gannets. Amazingly, they have never been shipwrecked or fallen from the cliffs. It is an enthralling story, already well-known but here told with the graphic detail that only first-hand experience can furnish.

The theme, convincing enough to a romantic like me but maybe less so to some, hinges on the semi-mystical force of tradition in a remote community. The men no longer really need the meat; the money, though modest enough, is doubtless welcome but mainly they do it for the keeping of the faith, the bond with their forebears and the binding power of tradition. Nowadays the slaughter of 2,000 young gannets will understandably offend many and would do so the more if they really knew what that harvest involves. To put it mildly, I don't like it, but gannets are thriving and hunting traditions as raw, cooperative and genuine as this one are rare. They have been lost and debased by modern methods all over the world. Perhaps the "for" and "against" cancel each other.

There are, incidentally, no insights into gannets to be gained from this book and absolutely no reliance to be placed on the author's throw away statements about numbers: his 30,000 pairs is a gross over-estimate. In fact, from his photos, Sula Sgeir looks thinly populated and capable of holding many more. It would be interesting to know if culling is having any effect.

Bryan Nelson



Gannets Bernard Zonfrillo

***Checklist of Birds of Britain and Ireland. 6th edition.** British Ornithologists' Union; 1992; 50pp card covers; £5.95 incl. p&p.*

This has been compiled by Alan G. Knox for the Records Committee of the BOU, and is a valuable addition to the series. The first list published by the BOU was in 1883. This new list covers 544 species and gives authoritative and valuable information. But the 18 page tick list seems somewhat inappropriate.

William Harper

Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East *by Lars Jonsson; Christopher Helm; 1992; 559 pp; £25; ISBN 0-7136-8096-2.*

Lars Jonsson's new book is to some extent a compendium of his five slim volumes devoted to the birds of a particular habitat or geographical region. But it is much more than this, since, apart from the text, it includes 140 completely new plates. With the plethora of field guides now on the market, what does this book have to offer that is different? One thing is obviously Lars Jonsson's illustrations; while the plates lack nothing in bringing out points of value in the field, they amount to much more than those familar studies which more closely resemble mathematically faultless engineering production drawings than portraits of a living creature. Jonsson's birds live; his Blackcap is eating a caterpillar, his Icterine warbler is peering at you suspiciously. Especially pleasing are those birds seen from unusual angles; the Great Crested Grebe coming straight at you, the Goosander glancing back as it swims away . . .

The judicious mixture of straightforward "recognition plates" with more "artistic" studies complete with appropriate background is very successful, the latter often portraying a bird's "jizz" in a way no plate of birds all facing the same way possibly could. The fact that some studies are not as happy as others is inevitable: the unlikely Glaucous Gull, a not very natural-looking Dartford Warbler, a plate of excessively dark waders in flight (not helped by the Purple Sandpiper's being miscaptioned as a Curlew Sandpiper), all come to mind in this respect. But with the number of bird portraits involved – we start off with no fewer than forty pictures of divers – 100% success could scarcely be expected, and this book come close to it. If you don't buy it, get someone to give it to you for Christmas.

Michael Murphy

The Birds in Wigtownshire *by R.C. Dickson; G.C. Book Publishers Ltd 1992. 165pp; ISBN 1 872350-35-6.*

This book gives the status and distribution of birds in Wigtownshire, the first systematic list to appear since 1869. The author has drawn from a wide range of data and local knowledge to compile this excellent book. Wigtownshire in sout-west Scotland comprises a wide variety of habitat with no less than 21 SSSI's eight of which are coastal, two woodland, eight peatlands, one river, one grassland and one island. The systematic list gives status within Wigtownshire including first and last dates of migrant and passage birds. Valuable data are taken from a variety of sources and give peak counts of wildfowl and waders, usually giving the key areas for a particular species. An index of localities named in the text is given at the end of the book.

All in all a very useful book for anyone interested in the status and distribution of birds in Wigtownshire, or just thinking of spending some time there.

Sylvia Laing

Bird Egg Feather Nest *by M. Koch, Stewart Tabori Chang, 1992, pages unnumbered, no price given, ISBN 1-55670-361-2.*

Not the usual bird book, this work's main feature lies in unusual and attractive illustrations. The text is set in an attractive reproduced manuscript. Very much a "coffee table" book; maybe just the thing for a last minute Christmas present.

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The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

'Proceedings of the Third IWRB International Swan Symposium'. Editor should read Philip J. Bacon not Brown as stated in SBN 27.

The price to WWT members is £8.00 and to non-members £17.00 (both include post and packing). Copies are obtainable only from ***Mrs M. Prior at The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7BT.***

Other books received 21 Regent Terrace.

Birds by Colour. The Simplest Identification Guide. Mike Lambert. Illustrations by Alan Pearson. Blandford Press. ISBN 0-7137-2295-9.

Where to Watch Birds in Wales. 2nd edition. David Saunders, Christopher Helm. ISBN 0-7136-3587-8 £10.99.

Where to Watch Birds in Cumbria, Lancashire & Cheshire. Jonathan Guest and Malcolm Hutcheson. Christopher Helm. ISBN 0-7136-3519-3. £10.99.

The Birdwatcher's Year Book 1993 *ed. J. E. Pemberton: Buckingham Press; 1992; 320pp; £11; ISBN 0-9514965-3-0. Obtainable by mail order from the publishers at 25 Manor Park, Maids Moreton, Buckingham MK18 1QX.*

The appearance of the Yearbook is firmly established as one of the events of the ornithological year, and this year's edition lives up to its predecessors' reputation. All the usual information is here together with a selection of special articles, this year featuring one on SNH.

Michael Murphy

Checklist of the Birds of the Western Isles *P. Cunningham; Western Isles Tourist Board.*

A useful little check-list with current status of each species.

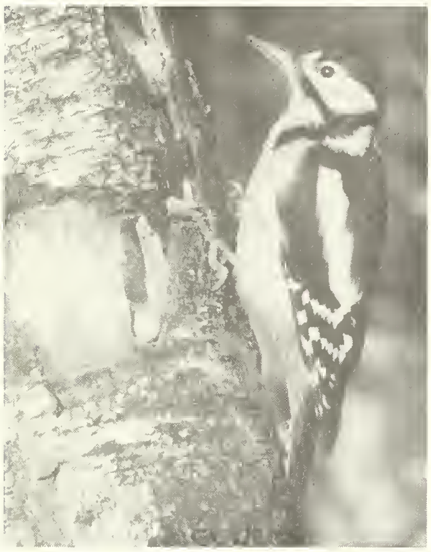
The Birds of Cyprus *by Peter J. Flint and Peter F. Stewart; 2nd edition; British Ornithologists' Union; 1992; 234pp hardback; £18.00 incl. p&p in UK; ISBN O 907446 140.*

This is the latest in this valuable series of checklists in revised and enlarged format. It gives a wealth of detail of the island's birds with maps and photographs.

William Harper

One Parent Family?

We have received an interesting note from Duncan McDougall, a member in Pathhead, Midlothian, about a Great Spotted Woodpecker which has been frequenting his garden. The bird, a male, first appeared last Christmas, apparently attracted by a nut dispenser hanging on a garden trellis. It soon showed agressive behaviour toward those birds for whose benefit Duncan had originally acquired the dispenser; the tits and finches had to learn to keep their distance, limiting themselves to foraging for fragments broken off by the woodpecker. The visits continued throughout the winter and spring as long as the supply of nuts was maintained. In spring the woodpecker started going through its drumming routine, and then, on the 9th May, suddenly stopped its regular visits. A couple of weeks later however it reappeared, but now in the company of two juveniles. At first the young remained in the trees with the adult transporting nuts from the dispenser up to them. Soon, however, they joined him both in getting nuts for themselves and in foraging for insects on a stump of dead elm which was leaning against the trellis. Later, a third juvenile joined them, and all four birds spent much of their time in the garden, apparently unconcerned at Duncan's presence when he was working in the garden within 25 yards of them. On one occasion, the adult was seen to retrieve a large breadcrust from the ground, wedge it into a fork at the top of the dead stump and then break off pieces for one of the juveniles.



Great Spotted Woodpecker *Jim Young*

The young birds were much more tolerant of the other garden birds; they would sit and wait while tits were feeding, and at the time Duncan wrote his note in July were much more in evidence, squabbling among themselves, than was the adult bird. A remarkable feature of the whole story is that all through this time, there was no sign of an adult female, althoughDuncan is sure the nest was close by, even perhaps in his own couple of acres of woodland. Duncan enclosed a whole series of excellent colour photographs of his visitors. Unfortunately they were not suitable for black and white reproduction; perhaps one day we will be able to go into colour, but not yet!

Michael Murphy

Erratum - Raptor Round-up

The table published in SBN 26, P2, should read as follows:

Peregrine

	NE	Cent	Tay	SW	SE	Arg	Hghl	Ork	Shet	W.I.'s	Total
Sites checked	95	47	119	107	35	101	273	35	5+	20	837+
Sites birds present	76	38	92	94	35	88	129	16	0	9	577
Sites laid	62+		48+	69	34	56	107-129	6-11	0		764-791+
Sites hatched			39+	47				4-9	0		–
Sites fledged	39+	23	58	44	17	27-35	58-85	3-9	0	4	273-314
Tot. young fledged	74+	49+	119+	88+	37	43+	90+	6+	0	7	513+

Golden Eagle

	W.Isl	Cent	Tay	Arg	Hghl	NE	Total
Sites checked	38	9	33	73	112	21	286
Sites birds present	32	7	25	68		16	148+
Sites laid	19			43		13-14	–
Sites hatched				29			–
Sites fledged	11	2	10	26	51	8	108
Tot. young fledged	16	3	15	32	56	13+	135+

Merlin

	W.Isl	Gram	Tay	SW	SE	Arg	Hghl	Ork	Shet	Total
Sites checked	19		93	25	21+	7+	31+	48	62	306
Sites birds present	10	51	64	21	21	7	31	16	31	252
Sites laid			48-49	16	15	4	24	13	20	140-141+
Sites hatched				9	11	4	20	9		–
Sites fledged	4	26	33	9	10	4	18	9	13	126
Tot. young fledged	9	71+	89+	35	30+	12	47	21-28	41	355-362+

Osprey

No. pairs known	No. pairs laying	No. clutches hatches	No. successful broods	Tot. no. young fledged
72	60	50	43	81

Countryside Reform

The RSPB's Campaign for the Countryside was launched on 9th September 1992, and put forward major proposals for agricultural reform. Its vision for the countryside includes plans to replace lost habitats such as hay meadows, wetlands and heather moorland. Failure to do so puts even common birds like Swallows and Skylarks at risk.

The RSPB is also urging the government to designate 30 per cent of Scotland under its Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme by the year 2000, to give farmers greater incentives to manage the countryside for wildlife. The highest priorities in Scotland for further ESAs are Orkney and the whole of the Western Isles.

Agricultural changes have destroyed a variety of habitats in Scotland. Native Pinewoods have been reduced to less than one per cent of their original extent, regeneration being prevented by excessive grazing by sheep and deer. Silage production doubled between 1979 and 1989, with earlier cutting making substantial areas unsuitable for Corncrakes. Thousands of hectares of Scottish moorland are damaged each year, some through poor management. 59 SSSIs suffered acute damage in 1990/91, with many more subject to ongoing degradation.

At least 40 species of farmland birds are under threat from intensive agriculture; these include Lapwing, Redshank, Barn Owl, Partridge, Corn Bunting and Corncrake.

Upland species under threat through declining heather moors include Merlin , Red Grouse, Black Grouse, Golden Eagle and Twite.

Recent EC policy changes provide an opportunity to make funding for farmers much more environmentally friendly. The government must now meet this deadline for action and lay the foundations for lasting reform. If it does not show that commitment, then the pressure from agriculture, mismanagement of wild land and poorly planned development will continue to destroy all that is best in our countryside.

Crimewatch

We make no apology for constantly harping on the theme of the illegal activities of egg-collectors and persecutors of raptors; it is a depressing subject but one of which we should all be aware. One of the few bright spots is the increasing readiness of the Sheriff Courts to hand down suitably deterrent fines. Thus four Hartlepool men who had stolen two Golden Eagle eggs were fined £5,000 in September. On the other hand, the RSPB drew attention in June to the activities of professional thieves of Peregrine clutches, who had probably been responsible for the loss of at least 100 eggs during the past season. Successfully raised chicks from these stolen eggs would be worth thousands of pounds to foreign falconers, and the RSPB's view that under such circumstances fines are inappropriate and that courts should have the power to impose jail sentences is hard to refute. Eggs are of course not the only target; in September the RSPB released a video illustrating the persecution of birds of prey which continues in Scotland. The striking scene where an RSPB staff member pulls a Hen Harrier corpse with gunshot wounds from its hiding place in thick undergrowth was not, we are assured, stage-managed for the cameras, but was a genuine find. And still it goes on; in October the press reported the finding of a Buzzard killed by a .22 rifle near a pheasant release pen on Skye. Since this was on the edge of the Coille Thog Beig NNR, it seems nowhere is safe . . .

Song Thrush Declines (?) - History, Geography and Research Strategies

The July issue of BTO News leads on an appeal for special research on the Song Thrush. There are indeed some grounds for concern - ringing data show that in the 1940s they outnumbered Blackbirds 3:1 whereas now this ratio has reversed; similarly since about I970 the CBC index for Song Thrushes has roughly halved. This is due to increased mortality of full grown birds (not breeding failure) and it is suggested that the major factor is lack of snails due to increased use of molluscicides. So far this sounds reasonable but I am aware of some complications that suggest that other explanations need to be considered seriously.

For example, a general survey instigated by Harvie-Brown in Strathbraan in 1905 showed that Blackbirds outnumbered Song Thrushes by almost 4:1 whereas when I repeated the surveys in 1973 and 1974 (Scot.Birds Vol 8) the ratio was essentally 1:1. In other words, going back another 45 years suggests a very different picture of Song Thrush numbers, possibly long term increases and declines not associated with any particular environmental feature. So I am concerned that to focus a large project on just one attractive explanation may be a very dangerous procedure.

There are other hints that strong local variations exist. Thus between 1977 and 1987 four surveys along the whole of Glendevon showed that Blackbirds outnumbered Song Thrushes about 4:1 (Forth Nat. Vol 14); however the contemporary picture for Strathbraan and for Glen Clova (SOC Dundee Branch 1979) is very different (1:1). So the Song Thrush is relatively most numerous in the more highland glens that are likely to be more acidic and hence with fewer snails. Thus I am unconvinced that snails are a vital factor for thrushes. Local peculiarities are not a purely Scottish problem; between 1973 and 1980 I made a number of transect surveys in the ancient oak/beech woodlands in the New Forest, Hampshire, and once again the average Blackbird : Song Thrush ratio is between 3 or 4:1, but this is in a habitat which cannot be reasonably assumed to be affected by molluscicides.

So my plea is for adequate pre-project research to establish a range of possible explanations - including the possibility of "inherent" changes, those for which we have no attractive story. In 1966 the distinguished ecologist Holling wrote "By establishing a number of hypotheses, rather than one, the scientist is able to avoid that degree of parental affection that seems so blind to fact." I do hope that this practical and profound viewpoint has not got mislaid in the last 25 years.

Cliff Henty

Song Thrush *William Paton*

Dotterel *Jim Young*

OAPs on The High Tops

It was Sylvia's idea. If Branches have outings, why not a works outing for the staff at No.21? The realisation that the only British breeding bird that neither Bill and Hetty Harper nor Michael Murphy had seen was Dotterel clinched it. They would all go and find one on the August Bank Holiday weekend. August came and at the last minute, sadly, Sylvia herself had to drop out owing to her mother's health. However, Bob and Betty Smith – who with all their work for the club are really honorary "staff" – joined the party which left for Glen Feshie hostel that weekend.

Saturday brought high winds and low cloud; any sensible Dotterel would either be keeping his head down or be en route for Morocco. Low-level walking seemed indicated, and a trek up Glen Feshie proved very pleasant if not particularly productive birdwise. The local Buzzard accompanied the party, and the trees were full of Siskins, but the main interest was botanical rather than ornithological.

Sunday however saw the group making their way up to the high tops. The long slog was enlivened by the inevitable Meadow Pipits and Wheatears, while the negotation of the track was made trickier by the need to avoid crushing the Oak Eggar caterpillars which swarmed in plague proportions. The first Ptarmigan just at the 3000 ft contour raised morale, as did a picnic at the head of the bealach. But of Dotterel there was no sign, only more Ptarmigan. After some time casting around suitable-looking areas on the slopes, the party virtually gave up hope and split up, the more masochistic pair of Bob and Michael having decided to make for the highest point. No sooner were they out of sight of the others than a bird rose from under their feet with an unmistakable trill, promptly landed again and obligingly waited while Michael hurried back to summon the others. All five were then given excellent views from all angles as the Dotterel paraded up and down, turning and pausing like a model on a catwalk.

Anything else would be an anti-climax, although Peregrine and Goosander were around on the Bank Holiday Monday in Glen Tromie; on this occasion the discoverers of the Dotterel missed out as they were again indulging their taste for masochism by pushing on the extra miles to the head of the Gaick Pass. But who cared? Dotterel had been the aim, and Dotterel had duly been seen. What is more, there weren't many parties up in the Cairngorms who could boast an average age of well over 65!

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Xmas in India	December

1994

Malaysia	January
Rwanda & Kenya	February
India & Nepal	March
Crete	March
Andalucia	March
Norwegian Voyage	May
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Peloponnese/Crete	May
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Other holidays for 1994 include the Amazon/Galapagos, Okavango/Chobe, Morocco, Florida/Belize/Tikai, The Gambia, India & Africa.

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SOC Notices

HELP!!!

Rollei P35 Autofocus Slide Projector

The Stewartry branch projector has unfortunately broken down. As this model is now out of production it appears that our one can only be repaired if we obtain another in order to cannibalise it.

Please does any member have one for sale or know where one could be obtained, at a very reasonable price?

Please contact Stewartry Branch Secretary, Joan Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW Tel: 0644 3226.

Thanks To

Helpers to stuff the September issue of SBN are again sincerely thanked for their time, effort and cheerful sense of humour; without their help this would be an impossible task. They are once again Stan & Margaret Abel, Phyllis Barrie and her daughter, Margot Cruft, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, Hetty Harper, Bob & Betty Smith and Norma Wilson.

200 Club

Winners for the third quarter of 1992 were:–

July 1st £30 - B.W. Smith, Dundee; 2nd £20 - Dr R. Hissett, Prestwick; 3rd £10 - A.D.K. Ramsay, Tain.

August 1st £30 - J.C. Jackson, Chester; 2nd £20 - Mr & Mrs R. Burn, East Kilbride; 3rd £10 - Mrs P. Collett, Thurso.

September 1st £30 - Mrs E.A. Munro, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 - Mrs D.L. Johnson-Ferguson, Canonbie; 3rd £10 - S.N. Denny, Glasgow.

For details of joining see SBN:26 for my address.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

Dumfries and Galloway Bird Report 1991

Copies of this report are available from Joan Howie by post at the price of £2.40 including postage. 60 Main Street. St John's Town of Dalry, Castle Douglas. Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW

STEWARTRY BRANCH

Stewartry Branch weekend outings for 1993 are:–

Friday 14th/Monday 17th May Bonar Bridge
Friday 3rd/Monday 6th September Mallaig
Contact Joan Howie.

Editorship of SBN

Members wiil possibly notice that the name of Kate Thompson has disappeared from our front page. Unfortunately for us, Kate's work has taken her off to the Falklands : her successor lives in Norwich and thus Falklands Conservation no longer has a room at 21 Regent Terrace. We are very grateful to Kate for all her work, wish her all the best in her new job and look forward at some point to seeing her back in Scotland.

For Sale

BIRD STUDY

vols. 4-34 1957-87 complete in parts. Offers to Librarian SOC. Minor runs and many parts also available.

The RSPB report outlining its campaign for the countryside is available from the RSPB, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BN. Price £5 (inc. post).

Scottish Birds

Journals 1979/1989 complete. Very good condition £160.00 o.n.o. Please telephone 091-264 1963 after 6.00pm.

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Membership subscription rates are as follows:
Adult..£15.00
Junior (under 18 or student under 25) ...£6.00
Family (husband, wife & children under 18) £22.50
Life, individual £300.00, family £450.00,
Pensioner, individual £8.50, family £12.00, unwaged £8.50
Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half Page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Photographic competition winners for 1992

Eric Middleton	Wren
Bobby Smith	Nightjar
Ian Todd	Sparrowhawk

Raffle Draw results will be published in next issue.

Red Kites

As part of the NCC/RSPB re-introduction programme a further 24 red kites have been released in the Scottish highlands this summer. *Please notify RSPB Highland Office immediately of any sightings by telephone if possible. Tel: 0463 715000.*

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office.

Lothian Recorder

The two lothian recording areas have now been amalgamated with the result that the whole of Lothian Region, including the Forth Islands (except the Isle of May) are now covered by:

Ian Andrews, 15 The Parsonage, Musselburgh, Midlothian EH21 7SW. Tel: 031-665 0236.

Records need no longer be in order and **please** tell the recorder as well as Birdline.

Thanks go to the former recorders Gordon and Chris McGuigan for their hard work in their respective areas.

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

MARCH 1993 No. 29
ISSN 0268-3200

Edited by Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy

Oil and the Environment

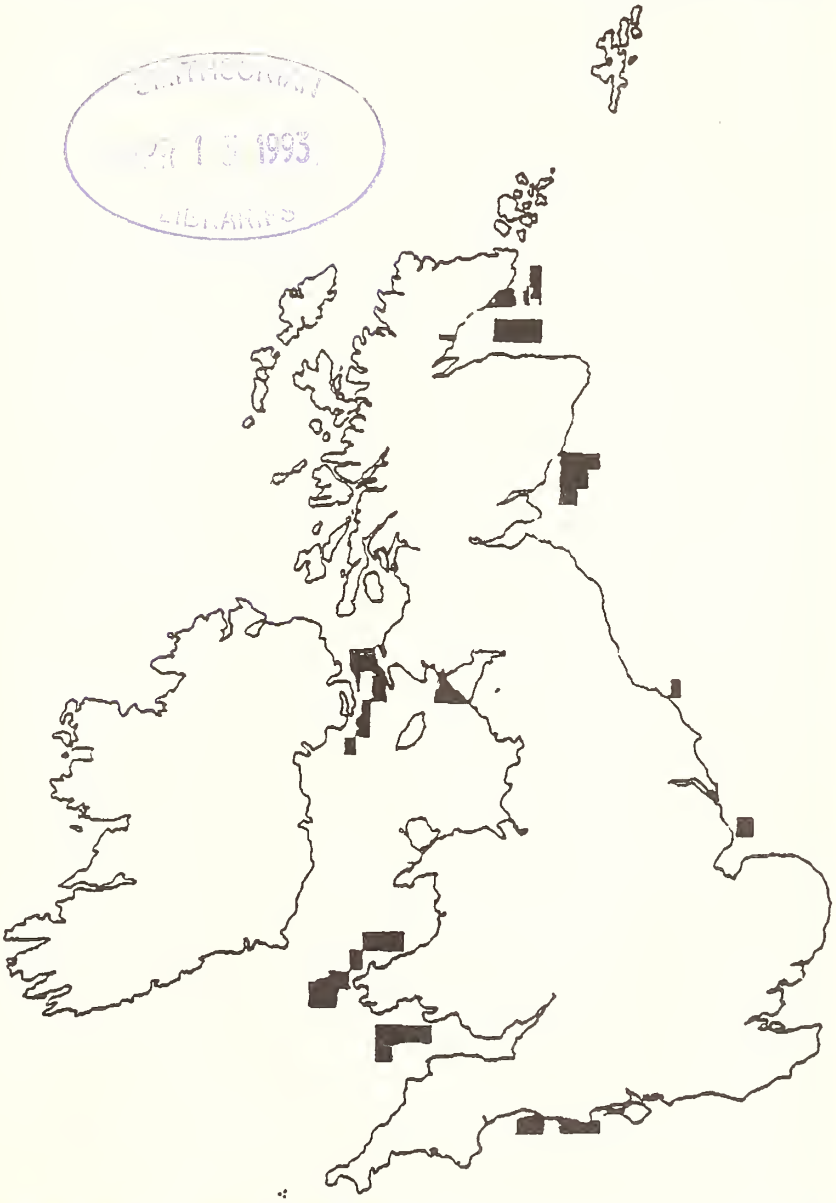
By the time this issue of SBN reaches you, no doubt for the majority of the population the wreck of the oil tanker MV Braer will be merely a vague memory along with names such as Exxon Valdez. It is important however that the government does not also suffer a fit of amnesia and shrug the whole thing off ... until the next time. For a next time there certainly will be if steps are not taken now to eliminate, or at least to minimise, the dangers constantly hanging over our seabird population. In fact, to talk only about the seabird population is itself to understate the case; not only are all marine life forms at risk but, as the case of the Braer underlined, so are the health and indeed the lives of land animals, up to and including humans, and the livelihood of fishermen, fish farmers and crofters.

The Braer, carrying 85,000 tonnes of oil or almost twice as much as that spilled from the Exxon Valdez, suffered engine failure and drifted on to the rocks near Quendale on 5 January; more than 18 months previously, the MP for Orkney and Shetland had written to the government pointing out the pressing need "to take a lead in ensuring that the latest technology is employed on a national scale to minimise the tragic pollution disasters which are waiting to happen. Surely we do not have to await a real incident involving a loaded tanker around our shores before appropriate action is taken?" The answer to his question is, unfortunately, "yes": the "incident" he - and hundreds of others - foresaw only too clearly has happened, and all we can do now is to avoid a repetition ... and another ... and another.

At the time of writing, the consequences of the wreck seem likely, thanks to the break-up of the oil in the virtually unprecedentedly stormy weather, to be less disastrous than at first feared. But three points arise from this. Firstly we do not yet know – and are unlikely to know for many months – quite what the longer-term effects are going to be on the marine food chain. In 1992 the Arctic Terns had their first successful breeding season after a series of breeding disasters in preceding years attributed mainly to the dearth of sand-eels; the sand-eels had come back. But what is the effect of the Braer's oil going to be on the young fry this year; is there going to be any recruitment at all to the sand-eel population, and if so on what scale? Do we see another year of few terns hatching and those which do starving to death? We simply do not know.

Secondly, this very weather which broke up the oil also obscured the mortality rate among seabirds. By 20 January, 1284 oiled birds had been recovered dead and 239 alive, in addition to 17 dead and 13 live mammals (see Table 1). But these figures quite probably represent a relatively small proportion of the actual casualties; for every bird recovered, the corpses of several more may well have drifted and been blown out to sea never to be seen again.

SMITHSONIAN
APR 15 1993
LIBRARIES



Other areas around the British coastline that could be in danger from the effects of oil exploration licences.

Table 1.

Oiled birds recovered, dead and alive, by 12.40 pm Wednesday, January 20:

Species	Total to date: Dead	Alive
Great Northern Diver	12	2
Black-throated Diver	1	0
Fulmar	11	0
Gannet	2	0
Shag	755	120
Cormorant	3	0
Grey Heron	1	0
Long-tailed Duck	96	28
Eider	66	50
King Eider	1	0
Red-breasted Merganser	1	0
Whooper Swan	0	1
Purple Sandpiper	1	0
Curlew	2	0
Common Gull	2	0
Herring Gull	11	3
Great Black-backed Gull	34	0
Glaucous Gull	1	0
Iceland Gull	1	0
Black-headed Gull	2	0
Kittiwake	55	4
Black Guillemot	185	21
Guillemot	14	8
Puffin	6	0
Razorbill	4	0
Little Auk	9	2
Rock Dove	2	0
Starling	5	0
Rock Pipit	1	0
Total	1284	239
Mammals		
Grey seal	10	11
Common seal	1	1
Otter	4	1
Rabbit	1	0
Polecat	1	0

Thirdly, there is the very real danger that the relatively little damage caused may serve as an excuse further to prevaricate about bringing in the necessary legal measures which should have been introduced years ago. It is not the actual damage we should be looking at, but the potential. Only a matter of weeks after the Braer disaster hundreds of thousands of birds would be streaming back to their nesting sites: indeed, had it not been for the storms, the Guillemots would already have been visiting their ledges prior to taking up their annual residence. Even outside the breeding season, the potential risk to a sizeable proportion of the British, and in some cases European wintering population of some species cannot be exaggerated (see Table 2).

Quite simply, oil is a danger to the environment and thus to us all; recent events should not blind us to the existence of oil-based threats apart from those presented by the transport of petroleum products through confined waterways. Back last July, the government was offering oil exploration licences in new areas: while it would be impracticable to suggest a moratorium on all new drilling – there are areas where it should do no damage – there would be enormous dangers in particularly vulnerable areas such as the Moray Firth.

We would urge all members, if they have not already done so, to write to their MPs and/or MEPs pressing the case for legislation.

Table 2.

Shetland: Winter Seabird Figures taken from winter counts 1991-2.

a. **Total Shetland**

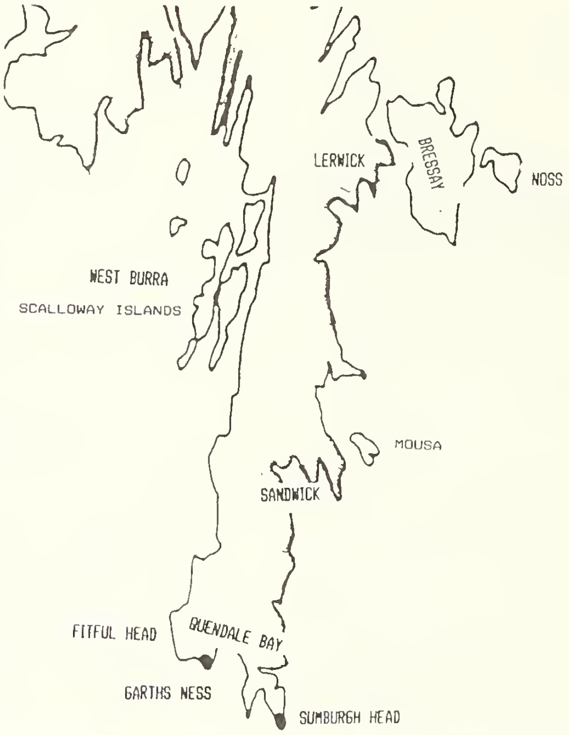
Great Northern Diver	300-400 (UK 2500-3000; Europe 5000)
Shag	12,000+ (UK 60,000; Europe 30,000)
Eider	7,000 (UK 72,000; Europe 2.5 million)
Long-tailed Duck	3-5,000 (UK 20,000; Europe 500,000)
Black Guillemot	12-15,000 (UK 38,000; Europe 200,000)

b. **Quendale and Sumburgh area**

Great Northern Diver	60+
Shag	1,000-2,000
Eider	200+
Long-tailed Duck	300+
Black Guillemot	150+

c. **North of Quendale/Sumburgh, to Scalloway Islands on West and to Mousa area on East coast**

	West	East
Great Northern Diver	50+	1-5
Shag	400+	400+
Cormorant	200+	–
Eider	450+	600-700+
Long-tailed Duck	400-500+	100-150+
Black Guillemot	500+	500+



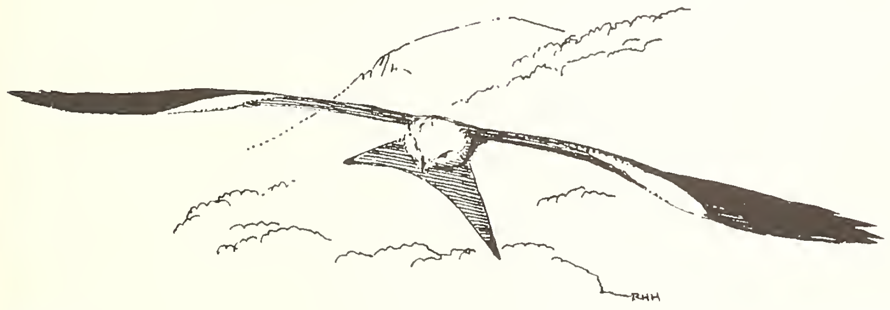
Map of the south of Shetland showing some of the main wintering areas for birds. (see Table 2)

Shags in flight: 755 dead and 120 alive have been found but many more will have perished unnoticed.

The action being recommended by the RSPB represents probably the best possible solution. They make eight cogent points as follows:

- * Immediate monitoring of all tanker traffic in sensitive areas such as The Minch, Fair Isle Channel and North Channel.
- * Through the International Maritime Organisation request voluntary avoidance of sensitive areas. Publicly urge all tankers to take the "outer route" rather than go through the Minch. Urge all tankers to remain well offshore all around the coast unless entering port.
- * Notify tankers of "unsuitable routes" in gale force weather.
- * Encourage highest standards in inspection and reporting at both UK and European ports.
- * Ensure development of the EC proposal to examine standards for tanker design, operation and routing.
- * Ensure that suitable rescue vessels and tugs are available in easy reach of main shipping lanes at all times in case of emergency.
- * Ensure immediate publication of coastal and marine environmental sensitivity maps by the Joint Nature Conservation Council.
- * Suspend immediately the 14th Offshore Oil Licensing round until such time as the full implication of the Braer incident and the environmental sensitivity of the 14th Round blocks can be more fully assessed.

If only some of these were implemented, that alone would represent a major step forwards.



Red Kite *Angus Hogg*
Remember to look out for wing tags on this species and report sightings to the RSPB. (see notice back page)

One Man's Conference

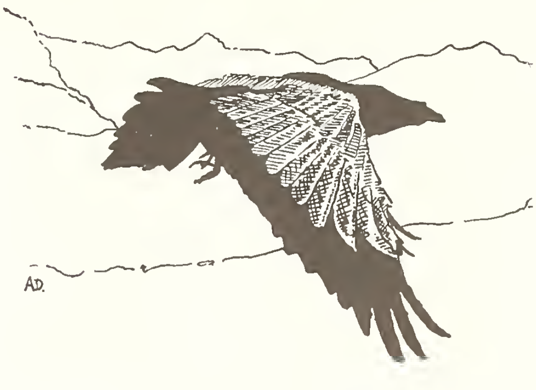
An Aviemore conference? .... certainly less handy than North Berwick for a resident of East Lothian but Speyside has its attractions even if Aviemore itself is badly in need of a facelift. The drive north saw Kestrel and Sparrowhawk hunting along the A9 in the evening sunshine. Darkness brought lower temperatures than those of us whose normal habitat is the coast are used to and it was clearly time to socialise in the bar of the Badenoch Hotel. As friends will readily confirm (none have – Ed.) strong drink rarely passes my lips but it seemed diplomatic to take the odd glass of Glenfarclas to support local industry and thus encourage the natives to think well of ornithologists etc. Also the beer in the Badenoch was cold, fizzy and excessively expensive. The combined effect of unaccustomed alcohol, the heat of the building and trying to make out Angus' Egyptian slides, all apparently taken on the run if not during the runs, suggested that fresh air might be more appropriate next morning than lectures. The news that the weather would be tolerable to start with, and then deteriorate, clinched it.

Dawn was indeed overcast but dry. Flocks of Fieldfares and Redwings moved through Speyside as though moving ahead of bad weather. Parking in a side glen which it may be prudent not to name I listened to an even gloomier forecast and a mewing Buzzard and set off for the hill.

Initially the ground was flat, green and grazed by rabbits. Several of these creatures had stopped feeding as a dark shape walked along the fence that separated the pasture from the open hill. Probably a cat from the farm at the head of the glen – hardly worth raising binoculars to bleary eyes – but it did look big and, when the glasses were used, showed the markings of a Scottish wild cat. Later enquiries revealed that the nearby farm was now unoccupied but there had been a kitten, supposedly of wild origin, which would not stay indoors and had disappeared. Whatever its pedigree it looked the genuine article as it unsuccessfully stalked a rabbit before disappearing among bracken and boulders.

With what was surely the wildlife interest over for the day the plod uphill could be postponed no longer. A rough track followed a burn up through heather on which stags were roaring but the lowering overcast promised few birds. Red Grouse were plentiful and Blackcock flew along the edge of a wood but crows were invisible; clearly the area was keepered. It did not look promising for raptors, at which thought a dark shape came off a cliff and revealed itself as a Peregrine. A second silhouette followed but was not, as first thought, the falcon's mate. Longer winged, different flight – Harrier? No. Forked tail – Red Kite! The angle and the dullness rendered any wing tag invisible and the bird drifted off into the murk.

The route climbed over rough heather and eroded peat. The previous evening was now taking its toll and a comfort stop proved essential if draughty. At least the weather made interruption by shooters unlikely while the owners of most of the binoculars in the area were dutifully listening to a lecture some miles away. However a feeling of being watched led to an upward glance. A large shape in the sky could only be an eagle, even if other priorities delayed focussing binoculars. It swung effortlessly into the freshening wind as another, smaller raptor came into view – the kite again? – no – mostly grey-white rump – this time it was a Hen Harrier. It too disappeared as quickly as it had come.



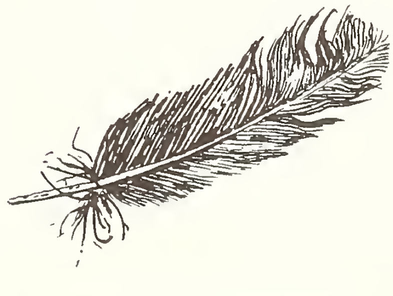
Raven *Andrew Dowell*

More grouse coveys hurtled overhead as the last, and slowest, stretch of moor was negotiated. Now came the hill proper, covered in recent snow which, tediously, gave way underfoot. On one of many pauses for breath the eagle reappeared, contouring the hill below the cloud base. A smaller bird ahead of it turned out to be the only Ptarmigan seen that day, though others were heard in the mist which closed in higher up. Croaking Ptarmigan apart all that impinged on the senses for the last 500 feet was wind driven hail. The summit cairn was iced over and uninviting. A rapid descent followed which slowed when the peat hags were again reached.

The clouds briefly lifted and sun dazzled against the snowfields above. The need to stop falling into bogs discouraged scanning the sky until an unmistakable croak announced a party of six Ravens. They seemed to have been foraging over the high ground though it was difficult to think what food was there. They, too, disappeared into cloud. As though on cue the eagle made its third appearance riding the wind then, half folding its wings, it angled down and across the glen.

Back at the roadside the rain started. Down in Aviemore the last talk was just finishing.

Stan da Prato



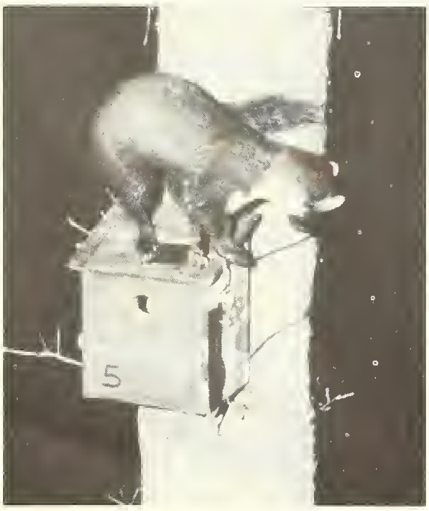
Pine Martens at Inversnaid, Loch Lomondside

During the summer of 1989, towards the end of the breeding season for woodland birds, several nestboxes on the RSPB's reserve at Inversnaid were attacked by an unknown mammalian predator. In some cases the lid of the box was ripped off. Other boxes showed signs of attack with teeth marks clearly visible on the lids and claw rakings on the sides. Scuff marks were also noted where the animal climbed the trees.

The situation deteriorated the following year, when from a total of 56 occupied nestboxes, 25 were predated and a further 14 were deserted after signs of an attack. The main bird species to be affected were Pied Flycatchers, but Blue Tits and Great Tits also suffered. Generally the lids of the nestboxes were forcibly removed and the contents ransacked; occasionally an adult bird was also taken off the nest. Where the animal was unable to gain access by the lid, nests were pulled out through the hole.

By now the predator had been positively identified as a Pine Marten by droppings. During the winter of 1990/91, attempts were made to deter further Pine Marten attacks on nestboxes. Firstly, all boxes had their lids re-inforced by tying wire over the lid. In many cases this prevented the animal from gaining access to the box from the top. Instead, though, the Pine Marten put its paw through the entrance hole and dragged the nest out, sometimes complete with contents. And where the animal was unable to get into the box by either method, the birds deserted due to disturbance from these attacks. Secondly, nine suspended nestboxes were erected, hung on the end of a piece of fence wire. Although these boxes were accepted by the birds (six were used by Pied Flycatchers, Blue Tits and Great Tits), the Pine Marten still managed to get into three of them.

The final figures for the 1991 season made depressing reading – out of 57 occupied nestboxes, 35 were predated and 3 were deserted. By now it was apparent that the Pine Marten was here to stay and that nestboxes had become lunchboxes. During the following winter, many boxes were closed down and renewed attempts were made to improve the hanging boxes. In the summer of 1992, 31 boxes were occupied, including all 10 suspended boxes. The Pine Marten accounted for 21 of them, with only one of the hanging boxes being successful. During the season an attempt was made to photograph the animal at work by Don MacCaskill. He succeeded on his first visit to Inversnaid, producing a picture of a Pine Marten standing on top of a nestbox trying to get in. This in fact was the first irrefutable evidence of the presence of Pine Marten; until recently nobody had seen one at Inversnaid. However, judging by the amount of droppings around, it would appear that there are several martens on the reserve, probably a family group. It certainly looks as though they are here to stay and that nestboxes are a thing of the past.



Pine Marten at work on a nest box.
Don MacCaskill

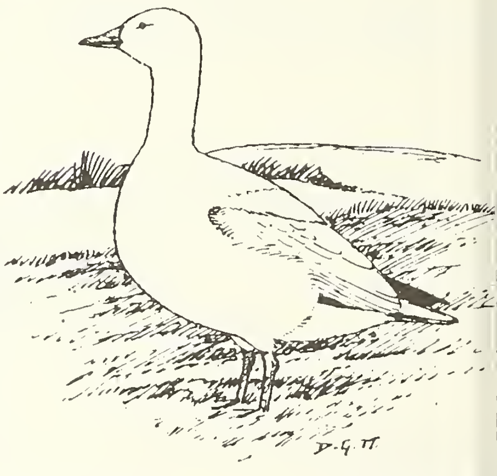
Pied Flycatcher one of the species most affected by Pine Martens destroying nest boxes.
Forestry Commission

The last dated record for Pine Martens resident on Loch Lomondside was 1832, when a pair was trapped at Rossdhu near Luss (correspondence of John Colquhoun March 5th 1880 in the J.A. Harvie-Brown papers). In recent years the Pine Marten has been slowly expanding its range in Scotland, spreading out from its stronghold in the north of the country. This is probably due to better protection for the animal. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Pine Marten was only partly protected in as much as it could not be killed by certain methods. However, since the Quinquennial Review, the Secretary of State for the Environment accepted recommendations that the Pine Marten should be fully protected. It is now an offence to kill or injure this animal as well as to disturb its breeding site. This is obviously good news for the Pine Marten but not such good news for birds using nestboxes.

Mike Trubridge

Disturbance of geese by birdwatchers

The appearance of a Greater Snow Goose in the flocks of Pink-footed Geese near Perth in autumn 1992 led to the disturbance of geese by birdwatchers looking for this bird. Twice when members of the Central Scotland Goose Group were counting feeding flocks and looking for colour rings flocks of several thousand Pinkfeet were put to flight by birdwatchers who stopped their cars within 50 metres of the birds and then got out to look at them, while on another occasion someone walked into a field where c.5000 geese were feeding to obtain a closer view. This behaviour shows an alarming lack of field craft and also a lack of consideration for other birdwatchers engaged in a serious study. It also gives birdwatching a bad image with the farming community when geese are moved off fields where they are doing no harm and may even be encouraged (i.e. stubbles, waste potatoes) on to other crops such as grass and winter cereals where they are unwelcome. The birds may also be exposed to shooting if flocks are disturbed from farms where there is no shooting to farms where there is. It is hypocrisy for birdwatchers to complain about disturbance to geese caused by shooting when some individuals are causing similar disturbance, and indeed doing the work of some shooting syndicates who employ these tactics in the hope of moving geese into areas where they can be shot.



Snow Goose *David Mitchell*

The increased pubic awareness of countryside issues and interest in wildlife needs to be associated with a better appreciation of the problems that the presence of people can cause to particularly wary species of birds and animals. Birdwatchers especially should appreciate that away from the television images and the hides at Vane Farm and Loch of Strathbeg wild geese are just that.

Mike Bell

Scottish Ringers Conference 1992

The weekend of 20th-22nd November saw the 18th Scottish Ringers' Conference held at its regular venue, the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar being attended by around 170 ringers, many of whom regard the event as an annual pilgrimage.

The usual Friday night slide show did not take place this year, so there was no distraction to drag people away from the bar area, which was very popular with the vast majority of those present.

The Saturday morning session was kicked off by Rik Smith of the host ringing group, talking on breeding Scottish Snow Buntings. Rik's study has shown that the population was bigger than found in previous studies of this species. Rik also pointed out the importance of snow cover early in the season as a food source and hence breeding success for Snow Buntings and his worry that any global warming could lead to a decrease in the Scottish population. Steve Rumsey continued the session with some of the early results of the much publicised Senegal expeditions and whetted the appetite of many for a trip to this location.

After the mid morning coffee break, David Jardine continued with an increasing insight into the problems of sexing and ageing Crossbills, a species which breeds throughout the year as a food source becomes available. Graham Rebecca followed with the results of his study of breeding Merlins in lower Deeside, highlighting some of the interesting breeding life histories he had obtained from the trapping of adult birds. Mick Marquiss returned to Crossbills saying that his talk was based on the copious notes which he takes in his notebook, which he said usually proved to be a load of rubbish (at this point one of his fellow Geordies interjected that he usually talked a load of rubbish as well!) but had on this occasion documented the 1990 Crossbill irruption in Lower Deeside.

We then broke off for lunch and had the afternoon free for local birdwatching with many people seeing the local specialities of Black Grouse, Ptarmigan and Capercaillie.

The Saturday evening session was led off by Raymond Duncan showing the interesting results obtained from his Waxwing colour-ringing in the winters of 1990 and 1991. Raymond's study ably demonstrated the amount of information which can be gained by individually colour-marking a conspicuous species with numerous resightings of his birds moving down through Britain. Carl Mitchell of the WWT followed with a study of the breeding Greylag Geese population of the Uists which has been steadily increasing but was now possibly being put under threat by a management agreement which was in favour of a longer shooting season for the species. Robert Rae then gave a short talk on a technique he had developed for catching adult breeding Dunlin and which he felt could be used as effectively with other Calidrids.

The evening session was rounded off with the annual BTO News slot, chaired on this occasion by Jo Hardman, Chairman of the Ringing & Migration Committee, who was on his first visit to the Scottish Ringers' Conference. Jacquie Clark of the ringing office said that the highlights of their year had been the changeover to the new style schedules which had gone very smoothly. The Ringing Site Registration forms were unfortunately taking longer to return than had been hoped but this task was now nearly finished. Some of the delays were attributed to the fact that the Ringing Office had been short-staffed due to Chris Mead's absence from work following an injury sustained when a bridge gave way under him! This usually lively session proved to be a bit of an anti-climax as there were no questions or niggles from the floor. Either the BTO is doing a good job or we are getting more tolerant in our old age.

The last scheduled event for Saturday was the dinner, which was of the usual high standard we have come to expect from the Fife Arms Hotel. After dinner the informal slide show was held in the entrance lounge. At this time the ever popular Bar area attracted large numbers as people took the opportunity to make new friends and renew old acquaintances from other parts of the country. This social session as is customary lasted well into the small hours.

Will Peach, of the BTO, had the unenviable task of presenting the first talk of the Sunday morning, and after proving his Scottish ancestry to the audience, he presented some of the interesting results which are now coming out of the Constant Effort Sites. Duncan Halley was next on the agenda with east coast Guillemots. Duncan's work showed that bad weather immediately after the young left the ledges seemed to have the biggest effect on the birds returning in later years, possibly indicating that this is the period when highest mortality occurs.

After coffee Tony Fox presented the results of his work on Pink-footed Geese. Tony pointed out the importance of snow cover in Iceland and how the grass at the edge of snow patches provided the best feeding. It was interesting to hear in the course of the conference how snow cover was important to two widely different species, Snow Bunting and Pink-footed Goose. Tony was followed by Pat Thomson who proved, by observations on a colour-ringed population, that young Lapwing do return to their natal area to breed. Keith Brockie presented the final talk of the conference. Keith showed that the numbers of breeding Ospreys in Tayside were increasing despite the problems of egg-collectors. It was thought that the increase in breeding Ospreys was largely due to the plentiful food supply of fish in Perthshire.

Waxwing *David Gowans*
No irruption this year! but interesting movements during 1990/91.

Following this final talk the ever popular raffle was held, this year we were assured with better prizes than ever (e.g. packets of Penguin biscuits and three ducks won by a vegetarian!)

Once again this was a highly successful conference, despite the alterations being made to the hotel which necessitated the lectures being held in the village hall. Our hosts, the Grampian Ringing Group, coped very well with the inconvenience caused by the alterations and are to be thanked for a very enjoyable weekend.

I, for one, am certainly looking forward to returning next November to this very convivial gathering when our hosts will be Clyde Ringing Group.

Colin J. Corse

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Stronsay – A reserve with a difference

We've all done it, we all know the feeling – was it really that? Dare I phone other birders? Did I get enough on it? There I stood at 8 am with that familiar mixture of excitement and uncertainty running through my veins having just had the briefest of glimpses of a small bird flying away just a few yards from the back door of our house on Stronsay. It carried on over our oats and disappeared from view. There were seven birders on the island, stuck in Orkney over the week-end due to fog, all bound for Fair Isle where they all hoped to catch up with the very species I was sure I'd just seen. And this was not just a good bird, it was virtually Fair Isle property, with the vast majority of British records from there! The plane was due to leave at 11.30 am, I had to move fast. A thorough search of our 19 acres revealed a few migrants but not the bird. Had we after all been too optimistic?

STRONSAY BIRD RESERVE
MILL BAY
STRONSAY
ORKNEY

The emblem of the Stronsay Bird Reserve.
John Holloway

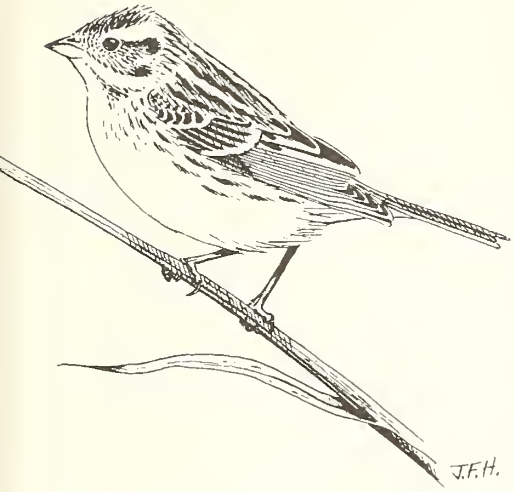
My family and I had moved to Stronsay in 1987 to set up our own bird reserve with a difference. Athough we had hoped to encourage some of the less familiar nesting species in Orkney to breed, our main aim was to set up a site of mixed habitat where many species of migrant birds could feed and rest with minimal disturbance – no ringing, no mist-nets etc. Ponds were dug, soil was brought in to create mounds and other features, small areas were left to become overgrown, shrubs, trees and wild flowers were added – all endemic to Orkney – and oats were sown. Great things were expected of the oats and by 1991 we had attracted Little Bunting and several Common Rosefinches to the site, the Rosefinches even bathing in our garden pond which we had strategically sited so that it could be viewed from all our downstairs rooms. It had worked! More and more species were being attracted to the site and with very few birdwatchers on the island at any one time the birds were left in peace. Farmers brought us piles of old potatoes or silage, ditch cleanings and subsoil, all of which we put to good use. Pipits in particular feed on these areas of rotting compost etc and two Olive-backed Pipits each spent a day or so on our reserve. Sylvia warblers take advantage of these areas too, particularly Blackcaps in late autumn but Barred Warbler has also been recorded. Buntings in particular have been quick to take advantage of this new habitat – especially the oats, which we do not harvest, preferring to leave it for the birds rather than feed our small herd of cattle on such a precious feedstuff! By 1991 six species of bunting had been attracted to the oats, many of them joining the local Reed Buntings which we see regularly, particularly in autumn. Following the Little Bunting of 1989 a Rustic Bunting – first seen in our vegetable plot right outside the kitchen window – spent a day with us in October 1992. It too was taking advantage of the weed-seeds and oats to feed on.

Having spent a year on Stronsay in 1977 prior to our move to Fair Isle where my family and I spent six years, we had seen the island's potential and felt sure that it was the ideal place to set up our business and it is most pleasing that most of our visitors have already been back for subsequent visits. No jostling for position here, no wondering whether the bird will be disturbed by trapping or a descending crowd of twitchers – this is bird-watching at its purest and how well I remember watching the four Greenish Warblers in 1988 alone – a complete contrast to the hundreds who were straining and jostling to see the same species in the South-West. Having said that, my first thoughts when finding a rare bird are "Who else would like to see it?" and we have an island 'grapevine' for those interested. We get many 'phone calls from the locals alerting us to 'a strange bird' and Orkney's first and only White's Thrush was found in this way in October 1990, being flushed from a ditch by a farmer who realised it was something different and alerted us. A Bee-eater was found by our next-door-neighbour in similar circumstances in July 1991 and we watched it hawking over our fields for the rest of the day. It is most satisfying and enjoyable that so many of the islanders help us and enjoy watching the birds. Without this help we could well have missed the Snowy Owl in '91, the two drake Mandarins in '92, the calling Spotted Crake in '89 and the first of our two Rose-coloured Starlings in July '90, all seen first by locals who alerted us. Our visitors too enjoy the help and enthusiasm of the islanders and it is without doubt one of the reasons why many return.

The majority of our visitors are like ourselves, preferring to find their own birds rather than following 'the mob' and none has enjoyed Stronsay more than our last visitor in '88 who found only the 13th ever Pied Wheatear in Great Britain along with Red-breasted Flycatcher, Richard's Pipit and Bluethroat; our last group of visitors in 1989 who found a Little Bunting – a new bird for all of them; and our last visitors in '91 who had come up to Stronsay hoping to find a Richard's Pipit for themselves and instead found an even rarer Olive-backed Pipit!

Male Blackcap
Blackcaps are regular visitors to Stronsay.
Sam Alexander

So there I stood thinking back on the previous five years. Radde's Warbler; Pallas' Warbler; Subalpine Warbler; Arctic Redpoll, all seen on the island and yet all to be expected. At 10 am another search through our oats and our optimism had been rewarded. Back in 1987 we had chosen for our 'logo' a species which reflected our optimism, a rarity yes, but a species we were convinced we could eventually attract to us by creating the right habitat – and there I was, looking right at it – a Yellow-breasted Bunting! This time there was no doubt – we had not after all been over-optimistic!



Yellow-breasted Bunting. *John Holloway*

Within 15 minutes the visitors were rounded up, brought to the reserve and were soon drinking coffee in our back-yard while watching what was a new bird for all but one of them. Being stranded in Orkney was not so bad after all! It did not now matter that the Yellow-breasted Bunting which had been on Fair Isle when the group should have arrived there had gone (probably even the same bird as ours) or that one had turned up in Norfolk – just five minutes away from where two of the party lived, shortly after they had set off on their holiday!

As we heard the 'plane heading for Fair Isle a few minutes later my wife Sue and I had to pinch each other to make sure it had really happened. Without doubt the most unexpected day's birdwatching we can remember and to ourselves the very essence of our work on Stronsay.

What are we aiming to attract next? Ortolan missed us by just 400 yds in late September, a male Sardinian Warbler missed us by less than a mile in the opposite direction in October, so who knows ... how about Pine Bunting?

John Holloway
'Castle', Stronsay, Orkney

Details of accommodation can be obtained from the above address or by 'phoning 08576 363.

Annual Conference 1992

The Annual Conference migrated North this year. After several years at North Berwick, Aviemore had been chosen as an alternative venue which should appeal to those members who felt that, for those outwith the Edinburgh area, East Lothian was rather out on a limb. A good turn-out seemed to justify this assumption. But be warned – next year the official cut-off date will be adhered to!

The traditional Friday evening slide show was compered in masterly fashion by Angus Hogg assisted by Bill McKechnie, and got the week-end off to a good start. The conference proper, after Frank Hamilton's initial welcome, was to have as its distinguished opening speaker Derek Ratcliffe, speaking on the conference theme of Upland Birds. At the last moment, however, he had been felled by a virus and Des Thompson had heroically volunteered to step into the breach. Any trepidation he may have felt at being confronted with the lecturer's ultimate nightmare of speaking with only the shortest possible notice was totally unjustified; no-one listening to his wide-ranging and informative talk would have imagined for one moment that he had prepared it in less than 24 hours. It provided just the impetus that a successful conference needs to get things moving.

He was followed by Colin Crooke, who told the cheering story of the success of the RSPB's rafts for breeding divers, and by Roy Dennis whose admirable talk on Eagles, Kites and Ospreys was everything we have come to expect from a man of Roy's vast experience. The Saturday afternoon was devoted to either "doing one's own thing" or participating in outings organised by Highland Branch, but everybody had the opportunity of seeing vast numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings who had, like the SOC, chosen that particular week-end to visit Speyside. Later that afternoon, the AGM was held before members went off to prepare for the Annual Dinner. The evening entertainment this year was live, with a ceilidh band providing the music for a host of enthusiastic dancers.

In spite of having gone on until the small hours, delegates were out in force on Sunday morning to hear two of our members talking about research projects partially financed by the Club's endowment fund grants. Both speakers gave a fascinating insight into some of the specialist work going on, Alan Heavisides talking about his long-term study of the Merlins of the Lammermuirs and Keith Duncan about his work with Dotterels, which included following them to their North African wintering grounds.

After coffee, members were entranced by the photographic work of Bob Lambie, who shared with them his years of experience in photographing upland birds. Last, but far from least, the theme of upland birds was abandoned for a typical tour de force by Chris Mylne, who made an impassioned plea, under the title of "The Scotland We Deserve", for the need for ever greater awareness of the pressing demands of conservation of the natural heritage we are all heirs to, brilliantly illustrated by his usual beautiful and evocative slides.

Nothing remained but to join the winter thrushes on their exodus from Speyside, but members had good memories to take with them of a conference which all agreed had been a successful new venture.

Charles
Frank

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Reviews

Audubon to Xantus: The lives of those commemorated in North American bird names *by Barbara and Richard Mearns, Academic Press 1992; 588pp; ISBN 0 12 487423 1.*

The only disappointment to this reader about the previous book by SOC members Barbara and Richard, on the people who had lent their names to W Palearctic birds, was that it included relatively well-known figures but, because of its limited geographical scope, omitted various unknowns whose names had always interested me: not least that of Xantus. Now I can have no complaints; more than that, I discover that the eponymous godfather of Xantus's Murrelet was an even more colourful figure than his name suggests.

This book covers a fascinating panorama of wildly different characters. People like Major Charles Bendire of the US Cavalry, who discovered the first Zone-tailed Hawk nest but was himself simultaneously discovered by an Apache war-party (he escaped, carrying an egg in his mouth to leave his hands free for his shotgun), rub shoulders with European aristocrats like the Duchess of Rivoli; American explorers like Meriwether Lewis feature along with English spinster ladies like Anna Blackburne who spent her whole life in the unexotic surroundings of Warrington, Lancashire; pillars of the British establishment like John Barrow find themselves in the same book as unprincipled Hungarian adventurers like John Xantus.

The depth of research involved is staggering, taking the authors from 21 Regent Terrace to Cleveland, Ohio: the list of institutions consulted occupies a whole page of the preface. The result fully justifies the effort. Although the book will probably find its most obvious market in America, it should not be ignored by European birders: many of the names also appear in the W Palearctic list. Barrow, Bonaparte and Bewick feature before you get beyond the Bs. I for one look forward to a third volume. How about birds of Central and South America? The Zapata Wren would round off the alphabet nicely for those of us hooked on biography as well as birds.

Michael Murphy

The Pinyon Jay *by John M Marzluff & Russell P Balda; T. & A.D. Poyser, London 1992; 344 pp; £20.00; ISBN 0 85661 064 X.*

This book will be of interest to both professionals and lay persons alike. The authors present aspects of the biology of the Pinyon Jay in an extremely readable format. The book is packed with information on a number of discrete topics which mesh together well to form an apparently complete picture of the behavioural ecology of the species and its unique relationship with the Pinyon Pine.

Having considered the taxonomic position of the Pinyon Jay the authors go on to explore the species' annual cycle, considering the spatial and social dynamics of Jay flocks, the timing of their breeding, their dispersal and life expectancy. At each stage the effect of the complex relationship between the bird and the tree is highlighted. The text is complemented by line drawings, photographs and clear figures.

Graham Scott

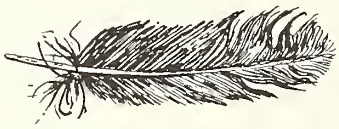
Bird Life of Coasts and Estuaries *by Peter Ferns. Cambridge University Press; 1992; 336 pp; £29.95; ISBN 0 521 34569 3.*

This is the second volume in the Cambridge Bird Life Series, following on from 'Bird Life of Mountain and Upland' by Derek Ratcliffe. Future titles in the series will cover other habitats in due course and will be welcome additions if they keep to the high standard of this book.

The book focuses on the British Isles specifically but where it is relevant includes research from other parts of the world. Chapters deal with the coastal environment, the open sea, rocky shores, estuarine shores and the coastal fringe. A final chapter on threats to coastal birds and their conservation is a good summary of the current situation. There is a need to be selective in this – including a wealth of examples, diagrams etc without getting bogged down in detail.

I would not regard this as a cheap book but it is good value for what you are getting – an excellent overview of coastal habitats and geomorphology in the British Isles and how bird species utilise them. It is an enjoyable book to read, illustrated with excellent Chris Rose line drawings and it contains a wealth of information drawing on very recent research. I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in seabirds, waders or wildfowl using our coasts. The reference list will also offer further up to date reading for those who like to go deeper.

Ian McCall



Identification Guide to European Passerines *by L. Svensson; BTO 1992; 368 pp; £25.00.*

Lars Svensson in this, the 4th English language edition of his 'legendary' guide, aimed mainly at ringers and research workers with a 'hands on' experience of birds, has made several improvements on previous editions, by moving to a larger format and re-writing the text in a more easily understood form than that of the original abbreviated style. Lars has also increased the number of species covered to 229 plus all valid sub-species, and has increased the number of very useful illustrations to over 300.

Much as this guide is aimed at ringers, it could also be of great value to those keen birders looking for plumage details, which could help in providing convincing evidence on the identification of rarities, and sub-species, a task I would leave to the really skilled. I for one would not like to separate Treecreeper from Short-toed Treecreeper through the eyepiece of a telescope.

For those birders wishing to do detailed studies of birds (even common garden species) without the problems of trapping and ringing, it is possible by the use of this guide to age and perhaps sex individuals of some species, details which might have gone unrecorded previously.

This is a guide for people with a need for detail, crammed with factual information, a must for ringers, but a useful addition to any serious birder's bookshelf.

George Smith

***Kingfishers, Bee-eaters & Rollers** C.H. Fry, K. Fry & A. Harris. Christopher Helm, London. 324 pages, 40 coloured plates. Hardback, £27.00. 1992.*

This is a gorgeous book of gorgeous birds. A worthy companion to others in this highly acclaimed series that started with *Seabirds* and includes the indispensable *Shorebirds*. It follows the successful format of finely produced full-colour plates of major sex, age and subspecies plumages, opposed by brief identification details and distribution maps; followed by a substantial section that describes each species in more detail, concentrating on identification problems and briefly reviewing distribution, habitat, migration, behaviour and breeding habits.

There are 87 species of Kingfisher, 24 Bee-eaters and 12 Rollers in the world. The artist, Alan Harris, has managed to capture the elusive iridescence of this group and the essential jizz of each species. For some reason, occasional plates seem rather pale (e.g. 11, 27, 31, 32) but the overall impression is very good. In future editions, I would recommend that a scale silhouette of the River Kingfisher is put on the plates to allow readers to gauge size easier. (The River Kingfisher is the one we know arrogantly as the Kingfisher, although it spreads from here to the Solomon Islands, overlapping in distribution with at least 50 other kingfisher species).

The authors have a good turn of phrase, making the book very readable. (For example, they describe nestlings in pin feathers as "like wizened little grey hedgehogs"!) Much of the text is couched in terms of evolutionary questions such as: why are some species solitary and others colonial, why are some cooperative breeders and others not, how has natural selection changed beak shape in response to diet, and so on. As expected from these authors the text is bang up to date and has for me many new nuggets of information, even about the Red-throated Bee-eater that I studied in Nigeria only 12 years ago.

It is staggering that so little is known about so many of these spectacular species – indeed, fully 40 of the Kingfishers are so poorly known that less than a handful, and sometimes nil, nests have been described. Even the weirdest species, the Shovel-billed Kingfisher of New Guinea, was best described in a 1937 paper and no nests have been found. I think that this is an essential book for all travellers to foreign lands. The authors hope the book will encourage people "to seek out these exquisite birds ... to discover new things about them". Buy the book. Go out. And Enjoy!

Humphrey Q.P. Crick

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***Bird Census Techniques**, Colin J. Bibby, Neil D. Burgess and David E. Hill. Academic Press, 1992; 257 pp; £19.50; ISBN 0 12 095830 9.*

This book is well produced, clearly written and packed with information on survey methods (and their errors) – mapping censuses (CBC), point and transect counts, distribution studies, capture and marking methods, counting colonies and flocks, and methods for particular species. Because bird densities depend on habitat, there is a chapter on habitat measurement.

Given the sponsors, it is surprising there is not more emphasis on the necessity of a licence before using several of the methods described, especially on Schedule I species.

One clear message is that it is much easier to measure relative abundance (eg numbers in one year compared with another) than the actual total number of birds. The latter requires knowledge of habitats and densities in them. Three detailed habitat data banks are mentioned, but information in them is not generally available. Making it available would greatly benefit researchers and bird clubs, and make it easier to design national surveys so that volunteers are not asked to survey inappropriate areas – a source of frustration which is not discussed.

This is a daunting book in places, especially the statistical methods, and not an easy bed-time read. But any birder who takes part in surveys would benefit from dipping into appropriate chapters.

Peter Vandome

"WE REALLY MUST GET A PAIR EACH" IF WE ARE GOING TO DO THIS CENSUS WORK PROPERLY!

***Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 1, (Ostrich to Ducks)**. Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and Jordi Srgatal; Lynx Edicions 1992; 696 pp, 64 colour plates, 382 colour photographs, 568 distribution maps, over 6,000 bibliographical references. £95.*

When I first heard that an unknown Spanish publisher was embarking on this mammoth publication, encompassing every avian species in the world, I admit I was sceptical. Then the pre-publication brochure appeared and I became enthusiastic though the price still deterred me, considering that this was but the first of ten volumes. However, now that the first volume has reached fruition, I can only say how wrong I was not to have jumped at the pre-publication special offer.

The first volume is truly magnificent. Lynx Edicions was set up specifically to produce this series. Every aspect of publication seems to have been carefully planned from the outset. The layout of the book is modern, visually attractive and exudes quality. Every species is clinically illustrated, in its most distinctive adult plumage. Highly variant subspecies are also shown. Care has been taken with the scale of accompanying illustrations throughout the book. In addition, a selection of high quality photographs are scattered through the text of each family. These depict aspects of biology or ecology discussed in the text and give reinforcement. They are not there purely as an attractive padding to the book. Considering the superb quality of the shots, many of little known species, this is a remarkable achievement.

Obviously, maps for every species, depicted in such a small scale yet encircling the whole world, can not hope to be perfect but they are remarkably accurate. They do not rely on simply regurgitating previous maps from other books but have been carefully modified with the update of new information. The vast bibliographical source list at the rear is a testimony to the care and patience that has gone into this work.

Hopefully, the team will all live to see the completion of this testament. It is an undertaking that most ornithological writers are envious of, yet lack the courage to attempt. Despite the cost, this is a book for the private collection and not as one might suppose only useful to the research student. I await with eagerness the birth of tome number two.

Bruce C Forrester

MERCAT PRESS

announces the publication of

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by
Martin Cook

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and other good bookshops

Recent reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to ***Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,*** *at the end of March, June, September and December. The period October to December is covered here.*

The only **White-billed Diver** reported during the period was an adult off Sound Gruney, Shetland on 28th Dec. 3 **Cory's Shearwaters** were reported between 9th-12th Oct., 2 off Fair Isle and 1 of Barn's Ness, East Lothian with a late **Mediterranean Shearwater** off Wick on 28th Oct. Of the 2 **Bitterns** reported, 1 was presumably a regular returning bird to Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh whilst the other was near Loch Derry, Wigtownshire in early Oct. Unexpected was a **White Stork** reported flying south over Islay on 22nd Oct. A **Spoonbill** picked up at North Roe, in Nov., and which eventually died was the 3rd record for Shetland.

Few **Bewick's Swans** were reported during the period the largest group being 18 near Cleish, Kinross-shire. Away from the usual area **Bean Geese** were in small nos. in Fife, Lothian, Tayside and Orkney. 4 **Snow Geese** were recorded, 2 in Perthshire and 2 at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve. Up to 5 small-race (i.e. potential genuine transatlantic vagrant) **Canada Geese** were on Islay but of 2 recorded in Aberdeenshire there was no doubt about one of the birds' origins: it had a yellow neck-collar. The bird had been caught in Maryland, U.S.A. in Feb 1992. The Aberdeenshire birds are thought to be of the West Greenland race whilst at least 2 races are involved in Islay. Amongst the Oct. arrival of **Barnacle Geese** at WWT Caerlaverock was last year's **Red-breasted Goose** on 5th though it spent most of Nov. and Dec. in the Caulkerbush area, Kirkcudbrightshire. At least 5 **American Wigeons** were seen, 4 of them in Fife and 1 near Aberdeen. 4 **Green-winged Teals** were recorded on Islay, Shetland, Orkney and in Ross-shire, 2 **Red-crested Pochards** were on Orkney and near Dumfries whilst the only **Ring-necked Ducks** were a pair on Speyside. Similarly only 4 **King Eiders** were reported, singles in Morayshire and Sutherland and 2 in Shetland whilst **Surf Scoters** were restricted to Fife and the Moray/Nairn coast with possibly up to 4 in each area. A drake **Black Scoter** was off Findhorn. Up to 17 **Smews** were seen, with widely scattered reports including up to 5 in Dumfries and Galloway and 3 together at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve though surprisingly none at Strathclyde Park.

North-east Scotland had the two rarest raptors of the period an imm. **White-tailed Eagle** at Aden Country Park on 2nd-3rd Oct. and at Bennachie a **Gyrfalcon** on 28th Nov. Late **Marsh Harriers** were seen in Renfrewshire and Orkney whilst in Oct. **Hobbys** were seen in Angus, Fife and Shetland. A **Quail** was on Unst in early Oct. American waders recorded were a **Lesser Yellowlegs** on Lewis, an **American Golden Plover** on Colonsay, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** on Unst, a **Dowitcher** sp. at Threave, Castle Douglas and a **White-rumped Sandpiper** in Fife. Between the 9th and the 25th Oct. there was the best ever recorded autumn passage of **Pomarine Skuas** involving mostly adults. 10 **Long-tailed Skuas** were seen between 3rd-12th Oct. off North Ronaldsay, Fair Isle, Lossiemouth and Barn's Ness.

Only 2 **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen at Doonfoot and Hound Point. Of the 3 **Sabine's Gulls** reported, 2 were in Nov. off Shapinsay, Orkney and Troon with the other in Oct. off Barn's Ness. Other rare gulls were 4 **Ring-billed Gulls**, 2 in Shetland, 1 on Lewis and 1 in Ayrshire and the now apparently resident **Iceland Gull**, showing characteristics of the races *kumlieni* and *thayeri* at Ayr. Of the 17 **Little Auks** reported 14 were between the 10th and 26th of Oct.

The only **Wryneck** was on Fair Isle on 4th Oct. whilst Shetland had the monopoly on rare larks with 2 **Short-toed Larks** and 3 **Woodlarks**, 1 of which was on Fair Isle into Dec. The Northern Isles also had their share of rare pipits with peak counts of **Richard's** being 5 on North Ronaldsay on 1st Oct. and 1-3 daily on Fair Isle until 8th Oct. The latter island also had up to 5 **Olive-backed Pipits** 1st-15th Oct., a **Pechora** on 15th and a **Red-throated** until 4th with further **Olive-backed** being 2 on Fetlar and 1 at Lerwick. After the recent **Waxwing** invasions this winter only c20 were reported mainly in the Northern and Western Isles. Only 2 **Bluethroats** were seen on Orkney and the Isle of May. The 5 **Siberian Stonechats** were all on Orkney and Shetland. A 1st winter female **Siberian Thrush** on North Ronaldsay from 1st-8th Oct. only the 3rd record for Scotland and Ireland. It rounded off a truly remarkable autumn for North Ronaldsay during which, amongst others, it had **Yellow Warbler, Yellow-browed Bunting** and **Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler**. Orkney also had a **Black-throated Thrush** on 23rd Oct. whilst Fair Isle had an **Eye-browed Thrush** on 4th Oct. 2 male **Sardinian Warblers** included a long-staying bird in Shetland into Nov. and 1 on Stronsay 29th-31st Oct. The only **Barred Warbler** of the 7 reported away from the Northern Isles was at Barn's Ness on 10th Oct. whilst a very late **Garden Warbler** was at Paisley on 21st Nov. The only **Arctic Warbler** was on Shetland whilst 3 of the 5 **Pallas's Warblers** were on Fair Isle, the others being on North Ronaldsay and at Cruden Bay, whilst notable amongst the 50 or so **Yellow-browed Warblers** was 1 inland in Aberdeenshire on 4th Oct and 1 in Wigtownshire on 10th Oct. The only **Radde's Warbler** and 4 **Dusky Warblers** were all in Shetland, as was a **Bonelli's Warbler** from the 11th Oct.

6 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were reported, the only **Red-backed Shrike** was on North Ronaldsay and a **Woodchat Shrike** was on Fair Isle. **Great Grey Shrikes** were reported in the Northern Isles though apparently no overwintering birds. A **Raven** at West Lomond, Fife is the first record for the county in (c70) years. A **Rose-coloured Starling** was on North Ronaldsay on 3rd Oct. whilst a **Red-eyed Vireo** was on Coll on the 3rd Oct. and is the 4th record for Scotland. 5 **Arctic Redpolls** were reported, 3 in Shetland, 1 in Orkney and 1 on the Isle of May. The 3 **Common Rosefinches** were on Whalsay, Fair Isle and South Uist, the only **Ortolan Bunting** was on North Ronaldsay, with 3 **Rustic Buntings** on Shetland and Orkney whilst at least 8 **Little Buntings** included 3 on the Scottish mainland at St. Abbs, Barn's Ness and near Aberdeen and at least 3 of the remainder were on North Ronaldsay. Finally a female **Black-headed Bunting** was at Aithsetter, Shetland until 3rd Oct.

Angus Murray

Joanna Thomson Jewellery

Top – stud earrings. Centre – stick pin. Bottom – drop earring, cufflinks or pendant.

Crested Tit Jewellery

After a successful launch at the conference, SOC can now offer a range of jewellery by mail order. The pieces are made in Sterling Silver in Scotland.

The range was modelled on the SOC's Crested Tit Emblem by SOC member John Hamilton. John works with his wife, Joanna, producing unique gold and silver designs, set with precious and semi-precious stones, under the name, Joanna Thomson Jewellery. They are based in Peebles.

Prices:

Stick Pin (for tie or lapel)	£10
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Drop Earrings	£22
Cufflinks	£28
Pendant (with 16″ chain)	£20

P.O. Box No. 2
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Tweeddale
EH45 8BW
Scotland

Financial Support for Small Projects
Wilf Nelson Rum Bursary

On 14 September 1989 Wilf Nelson suffered a fatal fall while carrying out routine survey work as NCC warden on the Island of Rum NNR.

Wilf had already contributed a great deal to nature conservation, both on Rum and elsewhere, in his short career and such was the widespread feeling of loss amongst his many friends and colleagues that a memorial fund was established. This fund, which is still open for donations, now stands at around £6,000 and with the support of Wilf's widow, Rosemary, it was decided to establish a Bursary which will be used to support small research/survey projects centred on Rum.

Applications for financial support are therefore invited for individual projects to be carried out during 1993. Preference will be given to studies on the natural environment of Rum, particularly its wildlife, but consideration will also be given to projects dealing with conservation management, including education and interpretation. It seems likely that around £600 will be available for dispensing during 1993.

A brief summary of the project proposal and estimated costs should be sent initially to the Reserve Manager, The Reserve Office, Isle of Rum, PH43 4RR and should arrive by 31 March 1993.

Further enquiries to:

Martin Curry, Reserve Manager, Rum (0687 2026)

Chris Eatough, Area Manager – Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Fort William (0397 704716).

British Ornithologists' Union
CONFERENCE
REPRODUCTIVE COMPETITION

Sperm Competition and
Intraspecific Brood Parasitism

Losehill Hall, Castleton, Derbyshire
March 26th – 28th 1993

Speakers include:
Marion Petrie
Terry Burke
Ben Hatchwell
Bart Kempenaers
Dik Heg
Anders Moller
Susan McRae

Spoken and poster papers are invited on any aspect of reproductive competition.

For further details and offers of papers (with a half-page abstract) please contact:

Mrs G. Bonham
(Administrative Secretary)
c/o British Museum
(Natural History)
Tring
Herts HP23 6AP
England.
Tel: 0442 890080

British Ornithologists' Union and University of Sunderland

Conference on
"CURRENT ISSUES IN THE ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OF ARCTIC-BREEDING GEESE"
17-18 April 1993
at
The University of Sunderland

A symposium on "Current issues in the ecology and conservation management of arctic-breeding geese" is being held at the University of Sunderland on 17-18 April 1993.

The aim is to promote the exchange of information on recent ecological research on goose populations and provide a forum for discussion. Speakers will include a number of goose experts who will be presenting a range of review papers on current research.

Further offers of papers for the meeting are welcomed and should be submitted together with a 50 word abstract as soon as possible to the address below. Poster presentations are also most welcome. Anyone wishing to receive further details (full residential facilities will be available) please contact:

Dr Steve Percival
Ecology Centre
University of Sunderland
Science Complex
Sunderland SR1 3SD
tel. no. 091 515 2532

A limited amount of financial assistance for full-time students to attend the conference is available but please apply as soon as possible.

Sand Martin *Rab Morton*
Oddly marked Sand Martin; could it turn up in Lothian??

Lothian Sand Martin Survey 1993

The Lothian Branch is planning to carry out a survey of Sand Martins breeding in Lothian in 1993. This will follow-up the survey done in 1983 in an effort to assess population and distribution changes in the last ten years. The survey will take place from mid-May to the end of July.

Anyone interested in helping and anyone who knows of Sand Martin breeding areas is invited to contact **Paul Speak, 49 Douglas Crescent, Longniddry, East Lothian EH32 0LH,** before the end of April.

Birds and Power Cables

We have in the past published reports on power cable fatalities in the Clyde valley near the Barons Haugh RSPB reserve (see particularly the lead article in SBN 22). Iain English has continued his monitoring of this site and has succeeded in making Scottish Power aware of and concerned about the danger. Methods of making the lines more visible are being actively pursued; in the near future a wrap-on fibre optic cable will be applied to the earth wire, increasing its diameter from 19mm to 31mm. It is this wire which is suspected of causing a large proportion of the injuries and fatalities, situated as it is above the thicker, more readily visible live wires; thus an approaching bird will lift above the wires it has seen, only to be confronted at the last moment by a hitherto unnoticed barrier. It is also felt that the formation flight pattern of swans makes them particularly susceptible: a lead bird may well clear the lines, but those birds at the extremities of a 'V' in which each bird is flying lower than its neighbour will not have sufficient height.

Irrespective of how the accidents occur, occur they still do: at least 66 birds, one third of them Teal and Mallard and another third swans, both Mute and Whooper, met with disaster in 1992. These figures which Iain has gathered may indeed be a considerable understatement; he points out that in times of flood, when access to the site is limited, many corpses may just be washed away, and at other times the thriving local fox population may well remove the evidence before he gets there. Over the years – and Iain thinks casualties have probably been caused ever since the 275kV Wishaw to Strathaven line was constructed in the early 1960s – the total number of birds dying in this unnecessary way must be considerable, and Scottish Power's efforts to minimise the danger is to be applauded. With their active concern, Iain feels justified in sounding a note of cautious optimism.

White-tailed Eagles at home and abroad

For the second year running, seven young White-tailed Eagles fledged successfully from their Scottish nests. They bring the total of young raised since the start of the reintroduction scheme to no fewer than twenty-nine.

The reintroduction project began in 1975, fifty-nine years after they had ceased breeding in the United Kingdom, and over the following ten years, a total of 82 young Norwegian White-tailed Eagles were released on Rum. This year, eight pairs are believed to have attempted breeding, of which four bred successfully, raising seven young. One pair failed at their first attempt but, four weeks later than the usual date, one young bird fledged from a replacement clutch.

This is encouraging news, but as Mike Pienkowski of the JNCC has said, "The population is building up only slowly. Numbers are still too small to be secure and the loss of a few key adults could still place the success of the project in jeopardy." We must hope that these breeding birds indeed survive and further improve their successful record in 1993.

SOC Notices

Stirling Branch Jubilee Reunion

Stirling Branch is currently celebrating its Silver Jubilee Season. If you are a founder, former or present branch member, a former guest speaker, or an occasional visitor during the last 25 years, the Branch Committee would like to invite you to a reunion members' night.

This will be held at The Eagleton Hotel, Henderson Street, Bridge of Allan, at 7.30 pm on Thursday 15th April. Following the shortest A.G.M. on record, there will be slide presentations, a buffet meal and a chance to relax and meet old friends. For further details and tickets contact Ian Wilson on 0786 473877, who would also be delighted to hear from anyone who might have slides of former branch 'Glory Days'.

Change of Recorders for Highland Region

It is with regret that we learn that Roy Dennis is stepping down as SOC recorder for Highland region after many years. We are however very pleased to welcome Colin Crooke to this post. Colin has agreed to take charge of all the area previously covered by Roy and we wish him well with this. Any records for 1991 and 1992 will be greatly appreciated by Colin at **RSPB, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BB tel. 0463 715000, or 0381 20566** for urgent contact.

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past two years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100 birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.

Indications are that young birds move considerable distances and I would therefore be grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. Any correspondence will be acknowledged.

Andrew Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.

Greylag Geese

Greylag Geese have been caught by the Highland Ringing Group and colour ringed and dyed yellow on the wings and tail in an attempt to gain further knowledge of movements throughout the winter. Any reports of sightings would be greatly appreciated and acknowledged. Please write to **R L Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire.**

Red Kites

As part of the JNCC/RSPB re-introduction programme with the RSPB North Scotland Office handling the Scottish side of things, would members please report any sightings of Red Kites to **RSPB North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible. Please do not think somebody else may have already reported your sighting: it is better to have more than one report than none at all.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office.

200 Club Success

By the end of May this year the 200 Club will have completed four years. During this time just over £6000 has been donated by its members, of which one half will have been given out in prizes and the other half used for the refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace. This has not only been a great saving of the SOC's general funds, but has transformed the Waterston Library. It has been repainted, has a new carpet, new curtains, chair covers and light shades – the first major work since it was opened in 1958, almost 35 years ago. Other work has been completed in the main office, kitchen and toilets. Council has expressed its gratitude to SOC members for their support of this relatively new venture.

At present there are 162 members, and renewal letters will go out in the next few weeks to those who do not pay by bank standing order. We hope that all will be willing to renew their membership. We also welcome newcomers (who must be SOC members over 18 years old) who would like to help the SOC, and at the same time give themselves a chance to win a prize in the monthly draw. See the notice below for the prizes and winners in the last quarter of 1992. When we have 200 members, some £1200 will be returned in prizes during the year, with the same sum going to Club refurbishment.

If you would like to join for 1993/94 (starting on 1 June) please send a cheque for £12, made payable to "SOC 200 Club" to me, or write and ask for a Banker's Order form. All cheques will be acknowledged. You can of course take out more than one unit of membership – some have two or even three!

A very warm 'thank you' to all members who have joined and helped the SOC in this way – your efforts are greatly appreciated. So far over 90 members have enjoyed winning prizes from £10 to £100.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. 089 682 2176).

Winners of the draw in the last quarter of 1992 were: –

October: 1st £30 – Miss D.C. Matchett, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 – W.G. Prest, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – Dr M.A. Keith, Edinburgh.

November: 1st £100 – Mrs M. MacIntyre, St. Andrews; 2nd £75 – D. Macdonald, Dornoch; 3rd £50 – Miss J.E. Howie, St. John's Town of Dalry; 4th £30 – R. Warhurst, Manchester; 5th £20 – Mrs M.J. Mylne, Strathyre; 6th £10 – D.L. Clugston, Glasgow.

December: 1st £30 – Mrs J. Denney, Glasgow; 2nd £20 – Mrs H.L. Harper, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – Miss V.M. Thom, Perth.

For Sale

Bound volumes of BRITISH BIRDS for sale

Proceeds to support the Waterston Library. Standard bindings 1948-69, 1971-72, 1981-82. Will split if necessary. Offers to Librarian, 21 Regent Terrace. Many volumes also available in parts.

"Scottish Birds" Vol. 1, No. 1 to Vol. 16, No. 4, complete, mint condition. Bargain £90. Telephone 0292 263202.

Young Artists

In conjunction with Lloyds Private Banking, the Society of Wildlife Artists is setting up a Bursary scheme for young wildlife artists between the ages of 15 and 25.

The aim of the bursary is to provide young artists with opportunities that might not otherwise be possible. The amount of the award will be up to £500 per application and may assist with such things as education, travel expenses, material costs or in other ways.

For an Application Form, please send a SAE to Wildlife Bursary, 3 Dene Drive, Orpington, Kent BR6 9EB.

COMPLETED APPLICATION FORMS MUST BE RETURNED BY 2ND APRIL 1993.

Further information can be obtained from:

Robert Gillmor (President: Society of Wildlife Artists) – 0734 871516

Burce Pearson (Treasurer: Society of Wildlife Artists) – 0767 677558

Simon Turvey (Secretary: Society of Wildlife Artists) – 0689 829754

ISLE OF MAY
BIRD OBSERVATORY
Firth of Forth

Comfortable, basic accommodation. Sleeps 6, weekly stays Sat. – Sat. from mid March to end October.

Breeding sea birds include Puffins, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwakes, etc. Spring and Autumn migration can be spectacular. East winds in 1992 brought Golden Oriole, Honey Buzzard, Melodious, Booted, Greenish and Marsh Warblers, etc. Qualified ringers can use the Heligoland traps – non ringers welcome.

For further details write to:
Rosemary Cowper, 9 Oxgangs Road, Edinburgh EH10 7BG or tel. 031 445 2489.

Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC

Printed by Ritchie of Edinburg

9QL
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S4S45
BIRD

THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish
Bird News

JUNE 1993 No. 30
ISSN 0268-3200

SMITHSONIAN
AUG 06 1993
LIBRARIES

Edited by Sylvia Laing and
Michael Murphy

First Success for the Scottish Red Kite Reintroduction

Nineteen ninety two saw the first success for the Red Kite reintroduction project, coordinated by the RSPB in Scotland and the JNCC in England.

In Scotland a pair of kites held territory in the Highlands from early February, when the first signs of stick carrying and nest building were observed. In April the female laid three eggs, all of which hatched in mid-May. Unfortunately the period of incubation and hatching coincided with a period of unseasonal weather with high winds, driving rain and cold spells. It is thought that food supplies at this time were poor and hunting for the adult birds was difficult; as a result sibling aggression accounted for the deaths of the two youngest chicks within one week of hatching. However, the single remaining chick fared well and with the onset of good weather and good hunting for the adults it grew rapidly before fledging in mid-July. Prior to fledging the kite chick was fitted with patagial wing tags and ringed; from sightings we know that this first-year kite has established a winter territory and has survived into 1993. This represents the first successful breeding attempt by Red Kites in Scotland for approximately one hundred and twenty years.

Nineteen ninety three heralds the final year of the five-year experimental programme to reintroduce the Red Kite to Scotland and England. To date sixty-nine Red Kites have been released in Scotland, the majority of which have survived. The survival rates of the released individuals compare favourably with the data available for continental populations of the Red Kite. In 1993 the RSPB propose to release a final twenty-four Red Kites in the Highlands, creating a reintroduced population centre of ninety-three individuals. It is considered that this will be a sufficient number of birds to create a core population of the species which will expand and colonise the Highlands.

Thus far the released population of Red Kites has been intensely monitored by means of radio telemetry (radio tags are fitted to the kite's tail-feathers) and wing tagging of individuals. The initial information gleaned from these sources would suggest that the birds behave in a similar way to the Swedish population from where the kites are taken as chicks. Approximately half of the population remain in the north of Scotland after release and the other half migrate from mid-September to mid-October to central and southern Scotland. The key wintering areas for the species would appear to be Dumfries and Galloway, the Borders, Perthshire and Angus. In addition birds have been recorded in three out of the four release years in Eire and in two years in England (Yorkshire and Cornwall). Evidence is increasingly building up to suggest that birds in their second year that migrated in their first year are likely to move a shorter distance away from the Highlands in their second year.

The choice of wintering areas has been mixed although most of the migrant birds seem to favour wintering areas with diverse agricultural practice in the lowlands. These areas would compare well with the areas occupied by the kite population in Sweden and northern continental Europe. Some birds have returned to the same wintering area year after year. One well watched individual released in 1989 has returned to the same area in Perthshire for four successive winters. Another bird released in 1990 has returned to Yorkshire for three successive winters. Both these birds have returned annually in the Spring to the release area.

Red Kite on nest *Duncan Orr-Ewing*

The first Scottish-bred bird for some 120 years. Let us hope that this 1992 chick will be followed by several more in 1993 as the basis for future range expansion.

The RSPB is indebted to the co-operation of the large numbers of landowners and gamekeepers who have helped with the protection of the species. The Red Kite has not been perceived as a threat to game rearing activities and birds have been appreciated by those who have come into contact with them. By way of a postscript, one estate has a roost of ten birds in a wood immediately above a pheasant release pen; the gamekeeper has yet to see a kite interfere with any of his birds.

Finally, the usual request: would any SOC member hearing of a kite or seeing a kite please report the sighting to the RSPB at the address below.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, RSPB,
North Scotland Office, Etive House,
Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW

Red Kite with friend *Duncan Orr-Ewing*

Disturbance of Schedule 1 Species

Once again reports of disturbance by birdwatchers on Islay are causing considerable concern to both the RSPB, the SOC and the local Islay inhabitants.

Every year a pair of Golden Eagles nesting is the Sanaigmor Cliffs, in north west Islay, are being disturbed by birdwatchers going too close to the site. It can be potentially damaging to the success or failure of these Eagles particularly during the period early March to the end of May, when the eggs and young chicks could become chilled, simply because people have disturbed the adults and kept them away from the eyrie for long periods of time.

As many of you will know the problems caused by the few irresponsible ones amongst us can have serious drawbacks to the work of conservationists as many landowners, shepherds etc, will not tolerate such disturbance and people trampling wilfully over the land.

It should also be remembered that a special Licence is needed to visit any site of a Schedule 1 Species, and any intentional disturbance of a Schedule 1 Species may result in a prosecution.

Schedule 1 Species

Under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the following bird species (listed in Schedule 1 – Part I of the Act) are protected by special penalties at all times.

Avocet
Bee-eater
Bittern
Bittern, Little
Bluethroat
Brambling
Bunting, Cirl
Bunting, Lapland
Bunting, Snow
Buzzard, Honey
Chough
Corncrake
Crake, Spotted
Crossbills (all species)
Curlew, Stone
Divers (all species)
Dotterel
Duck, Long-tailed
Eagle, Golden
Eagle, White-tailed
Falcon, Gyr
Fieldfare
Firecrest
Garganey
Godwit, Black-tailed
Goshawk
Grebe, Black-necked
Grebe, Slavonian
Greenshank
Gull, Little
Gull, Mediterranean
Harriers (all species)
Heron, Purple
Hobby
Hoopoe
Kingfisher
Kite, Red
Merlin
Oriole, Golden
Osprey
Owl, Barn
Owl, Snowy
Peregrine
Petrel, Leach's
Phalarope,
  Red-necked
Plover, Kentish
Plover, Little Ringed
Quail, Common
Redstart, Black
Redwing
Rosefinch, Scarlet
Ruff
Sandpiper, Green
Sandpiper, Purple
Sandpiper, Wood
Scaup
Scoter, Common
Scoter, Velvet
Serin
Shorelark
Shrike, Red-backed
Spoonbill
Stilt, Black-winged
Stint, Temminck's
Swan, Bewick's
Swan, Whooper
Tern, Black
Tern, Little
Tern, Roseate
Tit, Bearded
Tit, Crested
Treecreeper,
  Short-Toed
Warbler, Cetti's
Warbler, Dartford
Warbler, Marsh
Warbler, Savi's
Whimbrel
Woodlark
Wryneck

Dotterel – one of the specially protected Schedule 1 species *John Chapman*

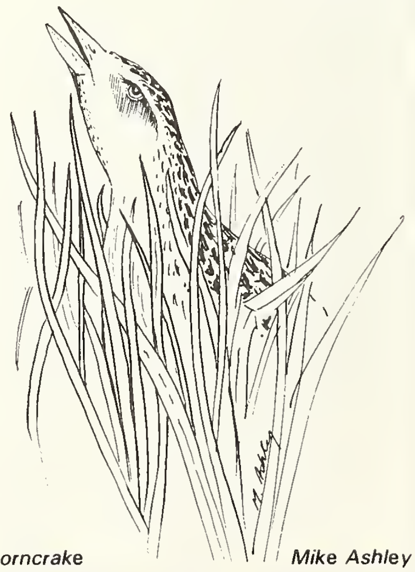
The following species (listed in Schedule 1 – Part II of the Act) are protected by special penalties during the close season, which is 1 Feb to 31 Aug (21 Feb to 31 Aug below high water mark), but may be killed outside this period.

Goldeneye
Greylag Goose (in Outer Hebrides, Caithness, Sutherland and Wester Ross only)
Pintail

Corncrake survey 1993: can you help?

Surveys of corncrakes in Britain and Ireland have been carried out in 1978 and 1988. The next one is being carried out this summer by RSPB, the Irish Wildbird Conservancy and the Irish National Parks and Wildlife Service. Rapid declines in corncrake numbers have occurred in some areas and the total population is dwindling, but some areas retain good numbers. There are strong relationships between population trends and changes in farming. More information on corncrake numbers is required to improve our understanding of the causes of the decline so that agri-environment measures like Environmentally Sensitive Areas can help the corncrake. RSPB surveyors will be covering the main areas for corncrake in the Hebrides and Northern Isles, but there are many other places that could have corncrakes this summer. You could help the survey by contributing records. Males are most likely to be heard giving their *crek-crek* call at night in late May or June. Any records of corncrakes would be valuable, but locations of calling males between 20 May and 10 July and evidence of breeding, such as sightings of chicks, would be especially useful. **Please telephone records from the Scottish mainland to your nearest RSPB office (Inverness 0463 715000; Aberdeen 0224 624824; Glasgow 041 945 5224; Edinburgh 031 557 3136) or send locations from anywhere – mainland or islands (six figure grid reference if possible) to Dr R E Green, RSPB, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BN.**

Rhys Green



Corncrake *Mike Ashley*

SNH seeks sightings for Goose Study

Scottish Natural Heritage is seeking help from the public as part of a detailed study into greylag and pink-footed geese populations presently wintering in Britain.

A significant number of the birds have been "marked" with numbered rings, colour rings or plumage dyes by Highland and Grampian Ringing Groups this year, and information is being sought from any member of the public who sees one of these birds.

"The marking of birds is a long-established and highly successful method of tracking their movements locally and across continents", explained Nigel Buxton, SNH North West Region Research Officer. "It provides valuable information on several aspects of the birds' lives including breeding success, ageing and life expectancy.

"Some ringing of geese has been carried out on their breeding grounds in Iceland, and we intend that the work in the UK should complement this. There is still a lot to be discovered about geese, particularly as regards their current distribution and movements during the winter."

Any information gained from observations of marked birds will contribute valuable data to studies by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust into goose movements nationally, as well as assisting SNH in its study of goose distribution and feeding patterns in the north of Scotland.

After being caught, birds are given a numbered metal ring on the right leg, a white coloured ring on the left leg, with an individual two or three letter code, and may be dyed a bright yellow/orange colour on the tail and under tail feathers (on greylag and pink-footed), or the tail and under tail feathers and forewing (greylag only).

Birds that were ringed on the breeding grounds in Iceland will carry a green colour ring, but none of these birds are dye-marked.

The dye-marking allows the colour ringed birds to be located quickly within a dense flock and allows observers to pinpoint the birds to give closer examination, if they are attempting to read the ring codes.

So far the reported sightings of birds marked earlier in the winter show an obvious movement from Highland Region south-eastwards into Grampian, as far east at the Loch of Strathbeg, and south into central Region. The geese will shortly be moving northwards as they prepare to return to their breeding grounds in Iceland and Greenland.

Any member of the public who sees one of the marked birds and would like to contribute to this study can contact either **Ian Stenhouse at Scottish Natural Heritage, Business Park, Strathpeffer Road, Dingwall, IV15 9QS (Tel: 0349 65333) or Carl Mitchell at Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7BT (Tel: 0453 890333).**

Greylag Geese – the subject of a detailed SNH study into the wintering population in Britain
Bobby Smith

Charles Frank

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Report of Ringing Birds on Eilean Nan Ron

On July 23rd 1992 a team of three bird ringers travelled from Wolverhampton, West Midlands to Eilean Nan Ron, an island in the Kyle of Tongue, Sutherland. The purpose of this visit was to spend three days on this uninhabited island to ring as many Storm Petrels as possible plus any other species we found there.

We landed on the morning of the 23rd having travelled through the night, the highlights of the journey being Barn Owl (near Perth), both Black and Red-Throated Diver and a single female Hen Harrier.

Within half an hour of landing the heavens decided to open, this not being the best weather to put up a tent on an island with no cover from the elements except the derelict houses. Our next objective after setting up camp was to find the freshwater spring as this would be used for our drinking water, and after double boiling it did make quite a decent cup of coffee!

The first bird to be ringed was a juvenile Meadow Pipit, which was tame enough to be picked up off the ground. This was followed by a brood of 5 Swallows found in one of the disused houses. This must possibly be one of Britain's most northerly nesting pairs of this trans-Saharan species.

The site for the first attempt to catch Storm Petrels was on the west side of the island but not long after the two mist nets were set up a cloud front blew in from the west and unleashed a torrent of rain. The nets had thus to be taken down before any Storm Petrels had returned to their nesting colony (this being around midnight). Considering the birds' safety first, none were ringed.

On the 24th we explored the North-East of the island to find a colony which had been netted with great success two years previously by a colleague of ours. Here we managed to see four Peregrine in the air together, including an audacious juvenile male who tried to "dive bomb" a Great Skua. Also noted along this coast were Rock Pipit, Black Guillemot and another Great Skua out at sea dismembering a Kittiwake. Within the next two hours we were going to get a lot closer to the Skuas. Firstly we accidentally found one juvenile on the path right in front of us, which was subsequently fitted with a ring as were the other six we managed to find. This was a most hair raising experience as the nature of the adult Skua is very aggressive, and it is a most awesome sight to see a 1.5-2.0 kg bird speeding towards your head to give you a clip with either feet or wings.

We eventually located the site of the colony, a channel in the rocks some 15 feet deep but tapering off towards a 90-100 m cliff. The nets were set here and a tape recording of the Petrels' intriguing but repetitive call was played to attract any passing birds into the netted area. This yielded 160 birds in three hours as well as three birds which had been ringed elsewhere; later we were informed by the BTO that they originally were ringed in Shetland, Fair Isle and, most spectacularly, in Norway; the exact details of this bird we are still waiting for.

The next and final day of ringing brought us a juvenile Great Black-backed Gull as well as two carcasses of that species, both of which had been ringed previously.

Another interesting species ringed that day was a Twite; unfortunately we managed to catch only one of the flock of thirty birds. We also managed to trap 2 Robin, 2 Wren and 3 Meadow Pipit. On a non-ornithological basis the highlight of the trip came when a Killer Whale was seen breaking the surface in the bay towards Strathy Point.

For the Storm Petrels we returned to the original site from the first night, where we managed to ring a further 120 birds with another 6 previously ringed elsewhere. These came from Scotland (Highland Region) (3) and singles from Isle of May, Fife, Tynemouth Pier, Tyne and Wear and from Co. Down, N. Ireland.

Apart from the first night the whole visit was an overwhelming success, and we hope we can make a return trip the same time this coming July.

Derek Gruar, Staffordshire University

Storm Petrel. The ringing programme on Eilean nan Ron has included some interesting recoveries Bernie Zonfrillo

Ruddy Duck problems

Ruddy Ducks originated in North America and were introduced to the UK by the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge, during the 1950s. Some escapees started breeding in the wild during the 1960s and since then their range has expanded to such an extent that they are now present in at least 17 other countries. The UK population now stands around 3,500 birds with some 600 breeding pairs.

Increasing numbers of Ruddy Duck in Europe are posing a threat to the White-headed Duck and some have already hybridised with the Spanish population; any further hybridisation with other European populations could threaten the survival of the White-headed Duck world-wide.

The UK Ruddy Duck working group Chairman Dr Colin Galbraith said "The number of countries which the Ruddy Duck has occupied in a relatively short period of time demonstrates how readily it will spread. The range expansion will have to be halted and even reversed, if the White-headed Duck, a globally threatened species, is to be safeguarded."

Since this problem results from human interference in the past, we have an international responsibility to take appropriate action in the UK to address the issue of the Ruddy and White-headed Duck hybridisation.

Unsporting "sport"

Thanks to pressure from local sources, including local SOC personalities, the slaughter of geese in Fife near Cameron Reservoir, which reached a peak a couple of years ago, has largely diminished. Unfortunately it seems, to judge by recent articles in The Courier, that the mainly foreign parties of shooters have merely changed their venue.

Large numbers of geese with sickening injuries such as shattered wings, missing feet and gaping wounds have been found at Kingoodie on the Tay. Whether, as was the case in Fife, illegal methods have been used is not clear, but it is evident that this slaughter is far removed from the activities of the legitimate wildfowler who treats his quarry with respect and would never leave a goose to a miserable lingering death. As Anne-Marie Smout says in the Fife Newsletter No 23, it is this "senseless mass murder which is intolerable. We find it shameful that we in Scotland should invite obviously incompetent sportsmen to shower our wildlife with lead in haphazard fashion". She suggests that the agents who bring over parties should be licensed and their activities monitored, and calls for pressure on MPs and the Secretary of State for Scotland to bring about a change in the law. We can but second her views and bring them to the attention of members outwith Fife.

Recent reports

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to **Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF,** at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

There is no doubt that gulls were the dominant feature of the period invoking memories of the halcyon days of the early 1980's. This year there was possibly an even larger **Iceland Gull** invasion than then, with Stornoway, south Mainland Shetland, Lerwick and Ullapool holding 20 plus counts. However there is little doubt that the star gulls of the period were the **Ross's**. From 17th Jan. there were 2-3 adults at Fraserburgh and an adult at Stornoway, but perhaps these were upstaged by the 1st winter which spent 2 months at Inverness. Interestingly amongst the **Iceland Gulls** 6 were found which showed the characteristics of the race *kumlieni*. Also interesting is the fact that all were adults or near adults - where are the immatures? **Yellow-legged Gull**, a perhaps soon to be new species, is now being recorded more frequently in Scotland: 3 were seen this winter. 3 **Ring-billed Gulls** were seen as well as 6 **Mediterranean Gulls**, all of the latter either at Musselburgh or Grampian.

Fife is certainly the county for wildfowl currently. Of 12 **Surf Scoters**, 9 were in Fife as well as 3 of the 7 **American Wigeons**, 1 of the 2 **Green-winged Teals** as well as a **King Eider**. Of the other 4 **King Eiders** a female was picked up, partially oiled, as a tideline corpse during the Shetland oil spill. A **Black Scoter** was again present in Burghead Bay and had moved round to Dornoch in March. The **Red-breasted Goose** proved very elusive in the Caerlaverock area whilst up to 4 small-race **Canada Geese** were on Islay, though the 2 near Aberdeen were unfortunately shot in late Jan. **Snow Geese** were in Grampian and near Loch Leven. About 15 **Smews** were reported, the largest count being 3 at Loch of Strathbeg.

Ross's Gull – a highlight among recent visitors to our coasts Malcolm Watson

If gulls dominated the early part of the year, March's best bird was the **Brunnich's Guillemot** at Musselburgh on 27th. 3 observers will be the envy of many. Shetland produced a **Killdeer** in the south Mainland from 14th-20th whilst a **Night Heron** was at Loch of Hundland, Orkney on 28th though found dead the next day, and a **Hoopoe** at Portpatrick, Wigtownshire 29th-31st. Early migrant dates included **Chiffchaff** and **Wheatear** on 9th, **Sand Martin** on 13th, **Sandwich Tern** on 26th, **Swallow** and **House Martin** by 27th as well as **Bonxie** and **Ring Ouzel** and a pair of **Garganey** on Orkney on 31st.

The only **White-billed Diver** was in Shetland in late Jan. Then there was also a **Snowy Owl** on Fetlar, with a male at Moss of Wester, Caithness. In a poor year for the species, 22 **Lapland Buntings** at Eyemouth was the largest count and similarly only singles were recorded of **Shore Lark** on Orkney, **Great Grey Shrike** near Dumfries and **Rough-legged Buzzard** on Jura. An **Arctic Redpoll** was near Brora on 26th Jan., a **Grey Phalarope** at Fraserburgh in Jan., 2 wintering **Spotted Redshanks** in Fife as well as 3 **Pomarine Skuas** there during Jan. and Feb. 2 **Choughs** at Roome Bay were only the second and third record in Fife this century and a **Hawfinch** at Nethybridge was only the second record for Badenoch and Strathspey.

Angus Murray

Many of the above records were featured on Birdline Scotland, an information service for Scottish Birdwatchers updated several times daily on 0891 700234 (calls charged at 36p/min cheap rate, 48p/min at all other times incl. of VAT). To phone in news please call (0292) 611994 (24 hr answerphone service).

The Perth One-Day Conference

The traditional Spring Conference held jointly with the BTO took place this year at the Station Hotel, Perth on 13 March. It was attended by 192 delegates and was voted a considerable success, thanks both to an outstanding galaxy of speakers and to the smooth efficient management of the hotel's domestic arrangements.

The morning was devoted to talks with a local flavour: Steve Moyes opened members' eyes to the wealth of the Tay reedbed, Les Hatton revealed some of the trials and joys of a Ranger's life on the Eden estuary, and Bruce Anderson shared his enormous knowledge of the Hen Harriers of Tayside.

In the afternoon, the conference ranged more widely. Henry Robb entertained the conference with his account of many years' work with the Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts of the Trossachs, followed by John Arnott's masterly overview of bird life in the Arctic, which took his listeners on a complete tour of the polar regions. After tea, it was the turn of the BTO, with Humphrey Crick bringing us back to this country, with its Golden Plovers and Merlins, and Peter Lack speaking on his latest research into the birds of lowland farmland.

These may be hard acts to follow, but we will try. Remember to put into your diary the dates of the next conference, for which we are returning to Aviemore on 29-31 October. Further ahead, the 1994 Spring conference will be on 5 March, and will probably be held in the Aberdeen area.

Conferences 1993/94

29/31st October 1993:
Annual Conference, The Badenoch Hotel, Aviemore – details and booking form with September mailing.

5th March 1994:
Spring Conference, Aberdeen area.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Raptor round up 1992

In 1992 Scotland's independent raptor workers continued to set the pattern and standards for this type of work in the UK. Raptor groups have now been established in Cumbria and Ulster, both looking to the Scottish model as an example of how to organise themselves. Group members continue to put in many hours of fieldwork, very often in addition to doing normal full time jobs, and usually at their own expense.

Many workers report the adverse effect of poor weather early in the season on early starters such as Golden Eagle and Peregrine. In contrast to 1991, however, the weather improved in the latter weeks of the breeding period and later nesting species such as Merlin seem to have reaped the benefit of this, although only in some areas.

Most groups were heavily involved with the national Golden Eagle survey and the continuing Hen Harrier tagging scheme has resulted in an increase in reporting on this species. This study has also provided some compelling statistics that illustrate the level of illegal persecution on some grouse moors.

1992 was something of a landmark year for the Osprey. As well as being the first "100 chick year" of this century it also saw the fledging of the 1,000th Scottish osprey since re-colonisation began.

Groups' interests continue to diversify as Buzzards, Kestrels, Owls and even that "honorary raptor", the Raven, now feature increasingly in minutes and newsletters.

The successful fledging of a Scottish Red Kite chick, at least a year earlier than anticipated, bodes well for this species as a new bird to work with in the not too distant future.

Golden Eagle with chick Brian Turner

Peregrine

North East Scotland RSG (Jon Hardy)

Atrocious early season weather meant that of 44 pairs that laid eggs only 25 got young off. 2.04 chicks fledged per successful nest, an unusually low rate for this area, and even worse than 1991's poor figure.

Central RSG (Patrick Stirling-Aird)

Although the mean of 2.42 chicks raised per successful pair is the best achieved in any Group's area in 1992, this was still a poor year. Two pairs occupied hitherto unused alternative sites and three pairs (not included in the totals) bred in hills in lowland areas of the Region. A further pair nested on a man-made structure in the lowland zone.

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Ron Lawie, Patrick Stirling-Aird)

None of the study areas in Tayside bettered a fledging rate of 1.82 per successful pair. The mean for the Region was only 1.72, making it, unusually, less productive than the nearby Central Region. One new pair colonised a now abandoned Golden Eagle site in the western part of the area and raised two young. In Angus a two to three-week age difference was noted between chicks in two adjacent sites.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad)

Site coverage was insufficient to provide summary figures for the whole area. However, work in previously under-surveyed parts identified new or hitherto unknown pairs on Islay, Jura and Coll with evidence of in-filling by extra pairs at some alternative sites. An unusually large (for the area) brood of four fledged at one site. One 1992-ringed chick was recovered injured in County Mayo in the Irish Republic.

Highland RSG (Colin Crooke)

With most workers heavily involved in Eagle survey work site coverage was down on the previous (full survey) year in this large Region. This patchy coverage makes it unsafe to draw conclusions about success rates but Sutherland certainly went against the national trend and had far better productivity than in recent years with 2.33 young raised per successful pair.

Western Isles (Lewis & Harris RSG, Uists RSG)

Although a generally poor year in Lewis and Harris, as in most other areas, the Uists were reported to be doing markedly better. The total of eight chicks fledged is a minimum figure which was almost certainly exceeded, it having not been possible to record the final outcome at some sites.

South Strathclyde RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

Although the awful spring weather can reasonably be given much of the blame for the very poor season, southern Scotland continues to suffer a very high level of nest robbery. Eight of the twelve failed nests fell victim to egg collectors or unscrupulous falconers – mainly, it is thought, the latter.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Chris Rollie, Dick Roxburgh)

Like its northern neighbour, this Region bears the main brunt of nest robberies. Fifteen failures were attributable to robbery in 1992, a level of interference that has shown no sign of reduction in recent years. Despite this and despite the bad weather, Dumfries and Galloway managed a productivity rate higher than several normally more productive areas with 1.98 chicks raised per successful nest.

Peregrine

Home range/site	NE	Cent	Tay	D&G	S.St	B&L	Hghl	Ork	Shet	W.Isl	Total
Sites checked	90	22	88	81	38	40	44	34	24	11	472
Sites birds present	64-65	16	72	76	28	38	38	20	5	10	367-368
Sites laid	44		33+	64	18	30	37	11-17	0		237+-243+
Sites hatched	26		26+			19	25	7-9	0	6	09;2-111+
Sites fledged	25	12	43	42	7	18	25	5-8	0	6	183-186
Tot. young fledged	51+	29+	74+	83	11	42-44	51+	11+	0	8+	360+-362+

Borders & Lothian RSG
(George Carse)

Despite the highest number of recorded failures at hatching point and despite continued persecution and nest robbery, 1992 was still the most productive year so far in terms of total numbers fledged. The rate of productivity, although lower than usual, was bettered only by Central Region, suggesting that this area may have avoided the worst of the bad spring weather.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

Poor breeding success continues to characterise Orkney Peregrines, a tendency which seems to persist even when Peregrines do well in the rest of Scotland. Oiling of chicks by Fulmars was noted at two sites, a further hazard that most mainland Peregrines do not have to endure.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)

Despite the presence of birds at five sites, Shetland failed to raise any chicks in 1992, the second year running that this has been the case. It would seem that this is one of the few parts of the UK still to have a declining Peregrine population.

Golden Eagle

The results of the 1992 national survey, to which RSGs made a major contribution, should soon provide the best picture so far obtained of this species' status.

North East Scotland RSG
(Robert Rae)

Although this is traditionally one of the Golden Eagle's more productive breeding areas, this year saw a very poor season. At the seven successful sites a mean of at least 1.14 and possibly up to 1.43 chicks was raised per successful pair. Twelve pairs had initially laid eggs. Late snow in April caused the failure of at least four sites.

Central RSG (Roger Broad, Dave Dick, Don MacCaskill)

This year's mean of one chick per successful pair is a typical productivity rate for Eagles in Central where fledged twins are unusual. Only three out of the five pairs which laid eggs achieved this, however, and only seven of the checked home ranges were occupied, reflecting the generally poor season.

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Dave Dick, Ron Lawie)

Tayside seems to straddle the east/west, good/bad divide that characterises Golden Eagle breeding success. Even in a poor year like 1992 the birds in Angus and eastern Perthshire do markedly better than those in the west. No chicks at all were reared this year in Perthshire west of the A9 trunk road. East of the A9, however, Perthshire achieved 1.8 chicks fledged per successful pair although only eight out of fifteen pairs there got as far as laying eggs. Angus managed 1.5 chicks per pair from its two successful sites.

Golden Eagle

	W.Isl	Cent	Tay	Arg	Hghl	NE	Total
Sites checked	71	12	24	94	126	17	344
Sites birds present	62	7	22	79		16	186+
Sites laid	24	5	11	64		12	116+
Sites hatched	12	4	8	31		8	63+
Sites fledged	11	3	7	17	41	7	86
Tot. young fledged	13	3	12	19	44	8-10	99-101

Argyll RSG
(Roger Broad, Mike Gregory)

Golden Eagle densities are high in parts of Argyll despite which it is rarely a very productive area. 1992's bad weather was hardly likely to produce an exception to this and although 64 out of 79 pairs laid eggs only seventeen got as far as fledging young (1.12 per successful pair).

Highland RSG
(Jeff Watson)

Differing success rates from various parts of Highland Region again reflect an east/west divide. Strathspey (1.2) and Easter Ross and East Inverness (1.2) significantly exceeded the regional mean of 1.07 fledged young per successful pair. The five other districts each recorded a mean of one, except for Skye which managed 1.08. A total of 44 birds fledged from the region as a whole.

Western Isles
(Lewis & Harris RSG, Uists RSG)

As elsewhere in Scotland this was a poor season. It is known, however, that at least four Eagle clutches were taken by an egg collector, thereby adding to the problems caused by the weather. A certain amount of local persecution also continues. Of the 24 pairs that laid eggs only eleven reared young, 1.18 per successful pair.

Merlin

North East Scotland RSG
(Graham Rebecca)

Productivity per pair was about average for the Region but with site occupancy lower than usual, at about 50%, actual numbers fledged were not much more than in 1991, itself a very poor year.

Tayside RSG
(Ron Downing, Wendy Mattingley)

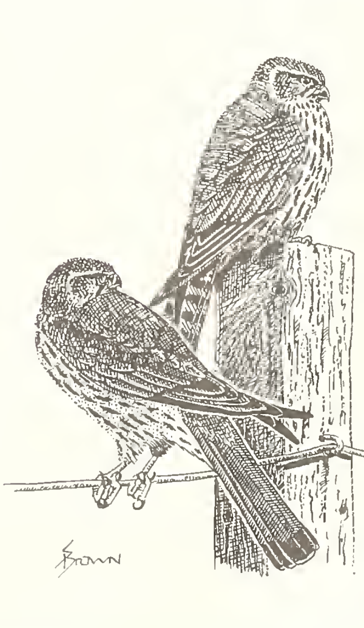
A generally poor season in both the Perth and Kinross and the Angus study areas. Productivity was low with 2.52 birds fledged per successful pair in Perthshire and 2.37 in Angus. Perthshire recorded only one successful brood of five. Significant levels of predation were reported in the Perthshire sites, six of the thirteen failed ground sites suspected of being lost to foxes and a further three successful nests with some signs of predation. Predation in Angus appears to have been less but one chick is thought to have died as a result of trampling by a deer.

Argyll RSG
(Roger Broad)

Six occupied sites were monitored in various parts of Argyll, one of them failing and the remaining five fledging eighteen young between them. This gives a rate per successful pair of 3.6 young reared, markedly better than some of the more easterly areas of Scotland, although this is a small sample size on which to base that conclusion.

Highland RSG
(Brian Etheridge)

Most parts of the region received some monitoring although Badenoch and Strathspey were poorly covered. The sites included 27 ground nests, eight tree nests and eleven crag nests. All the crag nests and most of the tree nests were in the far north. A mean of 3.13 birds fledged per successful nest indicates a generally good season.



Merlins *Steve Brown*

Merlin

	W. Isl	NE	Tay	D&G	S.St	B&L	Hghl	Ork	Shet	Total
Sites checked	18		98	18	12	46		50	62	304+
Sites birds present	17	42	66	15	10	29		19	26	224+
Sites laid	11+	42	53-54	7	10	20+	52	17	23	235-236
Sites hatched	11		39+	6	7	17+	47	11	18	156+
Sites fledged	9	28	33	6	6	16+	45	10	16	169+
Tot. young fledged	30	76+	82+	21	18	61	141	c.36	52	517+

Western Isles

(Lewis & Harris RSG, Uists RSG)

The outer isles achieved a mean fledging rate of 3.33 chicks per successful pair. This was a very good year and actual productivity was probably higher than this with several nests not monitored to fledging stage, especially on the Uists.

South Strathclyde RSG

(Dick Roxburgh)

This area also had a productive Merlin season with a mean of three young fledged per successful nest. The fine May and June weather is thought to have been especially beneficial to the ground nesters. One successful brood of four was reared within 50 metres of a similarly successful brood of four Hen Harriers, both nests being in rank heather.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG

(Chris Rollie)

As in South Strathclyde, a productive season with 3.5 young raised per successful nest. Considerable effort searching for forest edge nesters produced only five occupied locations in 46 kilometres of edge with only one of these pairs proven to breed successfully. Edges adjacent to rough moorland were seemingly favoured over those next to in-bye land.

Borders & Lothan RSG

(Alan Heavisides)

Overall mean productivity from four different upland areas was an excellent 3.8 chicks fledged per successful nest. Only the long term study area in the Lammermuirs was thoroughly monitored, however, and the productivity here (4.29) suggests that the true mean for the whole area may be somewhat higher.

Orkney

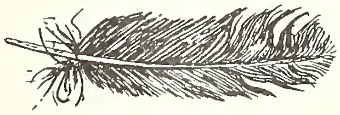
(Eric Meek)

1992 saw the third successive good season for Orkney Merlins. It is thought that 36 chicks fledged from the ten successful nests giving a mean of 3.6 per nest. As a result the islands' Merlin population continues to gradually grow.

Shetland

(Pete Ellis)

Unlike the dwindling Peregrine population, Shetland's Merlins had a successful season. Despite site occupancy being lower than in 1991, more pairs attempted to breed and more pairs succeeded at a higher productivity rate per pair (3.25).



Osprey

(Roy Dennis)

Despite a shaky start, with a cold, wet and windy April, 1992 was a major milestone in Scottish osprey history. Over 100 (actually 101) chicks left the nest, the first time this has happened in over a century. In addition the cumulative total of fledged birds since recolonisation began passed the 1,000 mark. It was in fact, in other respects, only an averagely successful season with more than the usual number of birds failing to return and with four of the 1991 sites unoccupied. In contrast there was much disruptive squabbling at other sites between the occupying pair and intruding non breeders. Three fewer pairs than in 1991 actually laid eggs. The latter part of the season, however, saw a marked improvement in the weather and this, together with the lowest level of robbery in recent years, provided the basis for the season's ultimate success.

Hen Harrier *Don Smith*

Osprey

No. pairs known	No. pairs laying	No. clutches hatched	No. successful broods	Tot. no. young fledged
72	61	48	45	101

Hen Harrier

Tayside RSG

(Bruce Anderson, Ron Downing)

In Perthshire 89 young fledged from 24 nests. 42 nests are thought to have had eggs initially. The high mean fledged brood size is probably attributable to the better summer weather but persecution still remains the greatest threat to these birds where they occur on managed grouse moors. Two bigamous males and one with three females were recorded. Five pairs or single females were located on the Angus moors but no successful breeding was seen in this area.

Highland RSG

(Brian Etheridge)

104 chicks were recorded fledging from 28 nests in various parts of the Region. All of these were wing-tagged. The overall mean fledged brood size is thus 3.71. The most startling statistic to come out of the present study, however, is the comparison between the breeding success of birds on unmanaged grouse moor and those on managed grouse moor. On unmanaged moor 90% of 21 pairs located were successful whereas on managed moorland only 34% of the 26 nests found succeeded in fledging young.

Uists RSG

(Allison Rothwell)

Birds were present at four of the five sites checked. Two nests are known to have fledged successfully but the number of birds raised was not recorded.

South Strathclyde RSG

(Ricky Gladwell, Chris Rollie)

37 young were recorded fledging from ten successful nests. Failure at eleven sites, however, was attributable to deliberate persecution. All these were on managed grouse moors.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG

(Ricky Gladwell, Chris Rollie)

25 young were raised from the seven successful nests in the Region with another four nests failing after eggs had been laid. Four further pairs failed to breed. Persecution remains a significant factor on some grouse moors in the east of the region.

Orkney

(Eric Meek)

Persecution notwithstanding, Hen Harriers generally did fairly well in 1992. On Orkney, however, this was not the case and 1992 proved to be the worst season since 1979. Although it seems likely that the weather was the main factor in this failure (persecution is not a factor here) it is curious that Hen Harriers in other parts of Scotland should recover well after the cool wet spring in those areas while Orkney birds seemingly did not. Furthermore, the Orkney Merlins had a good breeding season and had to endure the same weather. Only seventeen birds fledged from eight successful nests out of initial breeding attempts by 36 females, 31 of which laid eggs.

Buzzard

Highland RSG

(Malcolm Harvey)

Information was obtained from most areas of the Highlands although some parts were rather sparsely covered. 64 pairs were monitored and produced 104 chicks from 45 successful nests, a mean of 2.31 birds per successful nest.

Young Kestrels at Castle Loch, Lochmaben
Bobby Smith

Kestrel

Ayrshire

(Gordon Riddle)

1992, the 21st year of this long-term study, looked at first as though it would be the worst on record. That distinction still remains with 1986, however, for the appalling early spring weather gave way in mid May to drier and more settled conditions and the Kestrels took advantage of this very rapidly. Before the break in the weather only four clutches from twelve occupied territories had been recorded. In the space of four days, after the good weather started, fourteen more pairs were found in residence, many already incubating. Site occupancy remained the lowest recorded, however, at 55%. The overall failure rate of 36% was also one of the highest recorded but all failures occurred during incubation or before laying. 95% of chicks that hatched survived to fledging and all nests fledged at least part of their brood. Recovery was generally good to the extent that the mean of 3.75 birds fledged per successful nest was normal for the study area. Ringed pulli from previous years were recorded as far away as Dorset and France. An eleven year old bird ringed in Dalmellington was recovered dead in Suffolk, the oldest bird to be recorded from the study area.

Highland RSG

(Mick Canham)

Records were received from several areas of the Region for 44 sites, about half of them from nest box sites in Forest Enterprise plantations. The higher proportion of "natural" sites recorded in 1992 may be partly responsible for the reduction in mean clutch size (5.0) from the 1991 figures (5.6) since pairs in boxes have generally tended to have bigger clutches and to have a slightly higher success rate.

Keith Morton, RSPB

Reviews

Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa; the Birds of the Western Palearctic, Vol. VI. Warblers. *ed. Cramp, S. 1992. Pp. 728, 31 colour plates, Oxford: Oxford University Press. £75. ISBN 0 19 857509 2.*

BWP has reached volume six in what was to have been a seven part series. However, since the first passerine volume appeared in 1988 with over 1,000 pages it has been decided to restrict volume six to the Old World warblers and 'crests. Flycatchers through to shrikes will now make up volume seven and the remaining passerines volume eight. I think the editors' decision has been sensible as volume six still runs to 728 pages. It covers 60 species thus giving rather more pages per bird than its predecessors, a reflection of the amount of material that is available on this group. Warblers are easily overlooked little birds unless in song but they are highly suitable for studies of comparative ecology, moult, migration and song as well as a challenge to one's identification skills.

Reviewing a book like this could be said to be beyond the scope of one person who cannot do justice to all the labours of so many authors and editors. Obviously this sort of work contains errors; thus the five pages of corrections to its predecessors at the end of volume six. The important question is whether the book is a comprehensive summary of current knowledge and this it is. The pattern of the book is the same as earlier volumes except that comfort behaviour is now summarized under family rather than individual species. A feature of BWP has been the space given to bird sounds which are particularly important with warblers. I must say I am still more comfortable with written descriptions of song, despite their limitations, than looking at sonagrams. To get a full explanation of the sonagrams and other aspects of presentation of data it is necessary to refer back to volume five.

I liked the illustrations though there are marked differences in style among the four painters which could lead the inexperienced to think *Sylvia* warblers are all smaller birds than other genera. Plumage variation among *Phylloscs* is quite well shown. Hybrids are not and Goldcrests and their relatives look swollen headed. I was pleased to see so many illustrations of moving birds and of behaviour such as song flighting or mating, so often seen in the field but rarely photographed. There are also three full-page colour plates of eggs; the third of these includes some species now scheduled for the next volume.

Most purchasers of this book will already have decided to buy the complete set. Though volume seven should be published within months of this one the project is taking longer and will be more expensive than we all anticipated. In the long term that will not matter as this is a milestone in modern ornithology which contains observations from an army of fieldworkers.

Stan da Prato

A Guide to the Birds of Nepal *by Carol and Tim Inskipp; Christopher Helm, London. 1991; 400pp. 8 colour plates. Hardback. £35.00. ISBN 0 7136 8109 8.*

For a birdwatching holiday, Nepal is hard to beat. It has rivers and wetlands in abundance, subtropical forests, oak forests, rhododendron and bamboo forests and above them all, high altitude grasslands and glaciers. As a result, there is an immense diversity of birdlife, totalling some 836 species, all packed into a small area, but before Carol and Tim Inskipp appeared on the scene it was almost impossible to find any information on them. This new edition of their book on Nepal's birds is an updated and much improved advance on the first edition, published in 1985.

It has introductory sections on climate and vegetation, bird conservation, protected areas and particularly good birdwatching areas, but the bulk of it is concerned with identification and distribution. Production costs seem to have limited colour plates to groups of particularly difficult species such as warblers, finches and buntings, but there are many black and white sketches which along with the text descriptions should allow the identification of most species. For all except the rarest there are maps of known distribution and anyone who has been involved with the BTO's atlas work will appreciate the size of this task for a country such as Nepal where roads and observers are few and far between. Doubtless many of the maps are provisional, but the fact they exist at all is testimony to the dedication and hard work of the Inskipps. Visitors should remember to send new records to Carol and Tim so that they can continue to add improvements. The authors make it clear that their intention in writing the book was mainly to present information on distribution as an essential preliminary to conservation, but it is a pity they were unable to provide just a little more on the birds' ecology and behaviour. A few details on habitat preferences, for example, would have increased the value of the book to visiting ornithologists immensely as this information is hard to find elsewhere. Nevertheless, the book is a considerable achievement and a must for anyone who is planning a visit, and if you have nothing planned, well it just might encourage you to do some hard thinking!

Iain Taylor

A Field Guide to the Wildlife of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia *by Ian Strange; Harper Collins, London. 1992; 188 pp. Hardback £14.99. ISBN 0 00 219839 8.*

This book describes all the birds and mammals and some of the fish, invertebrates and plants that a visitor is likely to see in or around the Falklands and South Georgia. Seabird enthusiasts will still want to carry a copy of Peter Harrison's book for the more difficult groups such as the prions and in case a vagrant turns up. The author has lived in the Falklands since 1959. I am sure many of his comments on status and ecology are valid though the lack of quantitative data makes them difficult to evaluate. Half of the bibliography refers to the author's own work but that of some others, notable on geese, is omitted. I found the foreword by a politician decidedly off-putting!

Recommended with reservations.

Stan da Prato

Grouse in Space and Time: The Population Biology of a Managed Gamebird *by P J Hudson; The Game Conservancy, Fordingbridge 19921; 244pp; colour plates; many tables and figs.*

This book describes research work carried out on Red Grouse in the uplands of the North of England and Scotland by a team led by Peter Hudson of the Game Conservancy. It consists of seven sections dealing with the ecology and economics of grouse shooting, changes in numbers of grouse, Red Grouse demography, the population biology of low density grouse populations, social behaviour, Hen Harrier predation, the effect of parasitic worms, the effect of louping ill (a tick-borne disease) and heather loss and restoration techniques. The book is almost entirely a report on the work of the Game Conservancy Team: there is not much attempt at synthesis with the findings of other research on Red Grouse.

A decline in grouse bags in the 1970s was the main stimulus for the research projects upon which this book is based. It is believed that the size of grouse bags is fairly closely related to the size of the grouse population. Analysis shows that the decline in the 1970s is the latest of a series during the 20th century. The recent decline has been more marked in Scotland than in England and greater in western than eastern areas.

The book examines many possible factors which may affect grouse populations, with special attention being paid to the effects of predators and parasites. There are detailed treatments of some topics, such as the effect of Hen Harrier predation, causes of overwinter losses and effects of parasite infestation. Grouse moors with breeding Hen Harriers were found to produce 17% fewer young grouse than those without, a difference consistent with observed rates of predation on grouse chicks. There were indications that the impact of harrier predation would be less if moorland management was such as to achieve high grouse densities. The section on the effects of nematode worms on grouse breeding success and populations is an excellent summary of an important series of research papers by Hudson and his colleagues. Some topics get very sketchy treatment. The management and mismanagement of the main food plant of the red grouse, heather, gets surprisingly little attention, being relegated to sixteen pages at the end of the book.

A proper assessment of the relative importance of different factors for grouse populations and bags is lacking. This is a serious deficiency of the book for both moorland managers and ecologists. An attempt (Chapter 4) to relate variation among moors in the number of grouse shot per square kilometre to weather, number of keepers, heather management, underlying geology etc. using multiple regression analysis is weakened by the crude nature of some of the measurements and peculiar interpretation. For example, heather management by burning was only measured by a crude subjective assessment in one of the time periods considered. Even so, it emerged as a variable with which grouse bags were significantly correlated. However, this finding has mysteriously disappeared in the summary of the chapter and the synopsis of the book, to be replaced by a statement that "the effect of keepers is mainly through predation control rather than the pattern of heather burning". This statement could be true, but it is not substantiated by the contents of the book.

There are a multitude of tables and diagrams. However, readers wishing to examine the evidence for some statements will be thwarted by errors. Particularly annoying is Figure 12.2 which shows graphs relating the proportion of male grouse killed by different kinds of predators in relation to grouse population density. Three diagrams which are supposed to show different things are in fact the same diagram reproduced three times.

The text is easy to read, but the sections do not relate very well one to another. Too few references are made to other research and where other work is cited it is sometimes not clear what the source actually is.

In conclusion, this is a good book in parts. In particular, it contains valuable up-to-date information on trends in grouse bags and a synthesis of the Game Conservancy's excellent studies of the effects of parasitic nematode worms. However, it does not succeed in being a convincing account of the relative importance of factors such as predator control, parasite control and vegetation management in their effect on grouse populations and bags.

R E Green

Red Grouse – territorial cock crowing

The Ecology of Bird Communities *by Wiens, J.A. 1989. Vol 1 Foundations and Patterns Pp XVIII + 539, Vol 2, Processes and Variations Pp XVIII + 316. Cambridge University Press, UK Vol 1 £22.95, ISBN 0 521 42634 0; Vol 2 £14.95, ISBN 0 521 426359.*

Vol. 1

The first three chapters are best viewed as an introduction to the subject, including the testing of hypotheses and measurement of variables. The combination of the history of the subject/terms used is vital to any one working in the area (but not easy reading). The following 10 chapters are a mixture of case studies enclosed within a framework of hypotheses and the evolved theory.

Vol. 2

Volume 2 contains many case studies which are likely to be of interest to most people studying bird communities and the constraints they operate within. Competition is dealt with in most of its facets along with influences such as predation, parasitism, etc. Before ending there is a most interesting section on how the author views the route of future directions for avian community ecology. Each volume contains a very comprehensive reference section, author and subject index.

Vols. 1 & 2

These two volumes are part of the Cambridge University series of studies in ecology. The series is aimed at higher education students/staff and research workers. However it has much to offer the interested reader from other backgrounds. The main benefit of this work is that it brings together a great deal of work from around the world on a whole range of species. Instead of that being the end product it succeeds in putting the above into varying theoretical frameworks. The text also deliberately shows up many of the potential pitfalls that are too easy to fall into by not considering alternatives. Not an easy work but well worth the effort. Could the two volumes have been put together, resulting in a lower price?

Ian K. Langford

Addicted to Birds *by Annie Rogers, published by the author, 340 Ninks Road, St Andrews, Victoria, Australia 3761; 218pp; Aus $25+p&p; ISBN 0 646 11194 9.*

A highly entertaining account of birding in the Middle East and Australia with a brief interlude in Skye, about which the author is not very complimentary. It rained.

Michael Murphy

Other books received

Endangered Birds *by James Ferguson-Lees and Emma Faull. George Philip Ltd 1992; 192pp; £19.99; ISBN 0 540 01248 3.*

Highland Sketchbook – A Year in Glen Esk *by Derek Robertson. Collins Leisure 1992; 165pp; £17.99; ISBN 0 00 434590 8.*

Peregrine Falcons *by Candace Savage. Robert Hale 1992; 145pp; £16.95; ISBN 0 7090 4973 0.*

The Robin *by Mike Read, Martin King & Jake Allsop. Blandford 1992; 128pp; £16.99; ISBN 0 7137 2156 1.*

Birds on Lowland Farms *by Peter Lack. HMSO 1992; 140pp; £14.95; ISBN 0 11 242922 X.*

Discovering Birds *by Rob Hume. RSPB 1992; 240pp; ISBN 0 903138 53 0.*

Birds, Discovery and Conservation: 100 Years of the British Ornithologists' Club *by David Snow. Helm 1992; 198pp; £19.95; ISBN 1 873404 15 1.*

Watching Wildlife: A Field Guide to the Wildlife Habitats of Britain *by Geoffrey Young and Elaine Franks. George Philip 1992; 223pp; £14.99; ISBN 0 540 01262 9.*

Of Birds and Men *by Herbert Axell. The Book Guild 1992; 284pp; £14.95; ISBN 0 86332 747 8.*

Bird Migration *by Thomas Alerstam. Cambridge 1993 (Paperback); 420pp; £19.95; ISBN 0 521 44822 0.*

Where to Watch Birds in Scotland 2nd edition *by Mike Madders & Julia Welstead. Helm 1993; 313pp; £11.99; ISBN 0 7136 3704 8.*

New Books From

T & AD POYSER

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In his new book, Tim Birkhead draws on seven summers' experience in the Arctic describing the sheer beauty of the Arctic environment and the intriguing biology of its wildlife. He discusses in detail the many facets of natural history research and brings to life the difficulties and the excitement of working in the Arctic. Topics of special ecological concern include the destruction of Canada's legendary cod fishery and the impact of this on other wildlife and the discovery and exploitation of the enormous seabird colonies including the destruction of the Great Auk.

ISBN: 085661-077-0, 320 pages
To Be Published: May 1993, £24.50

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ISBN: 0-85661-060-7, c. 448pages
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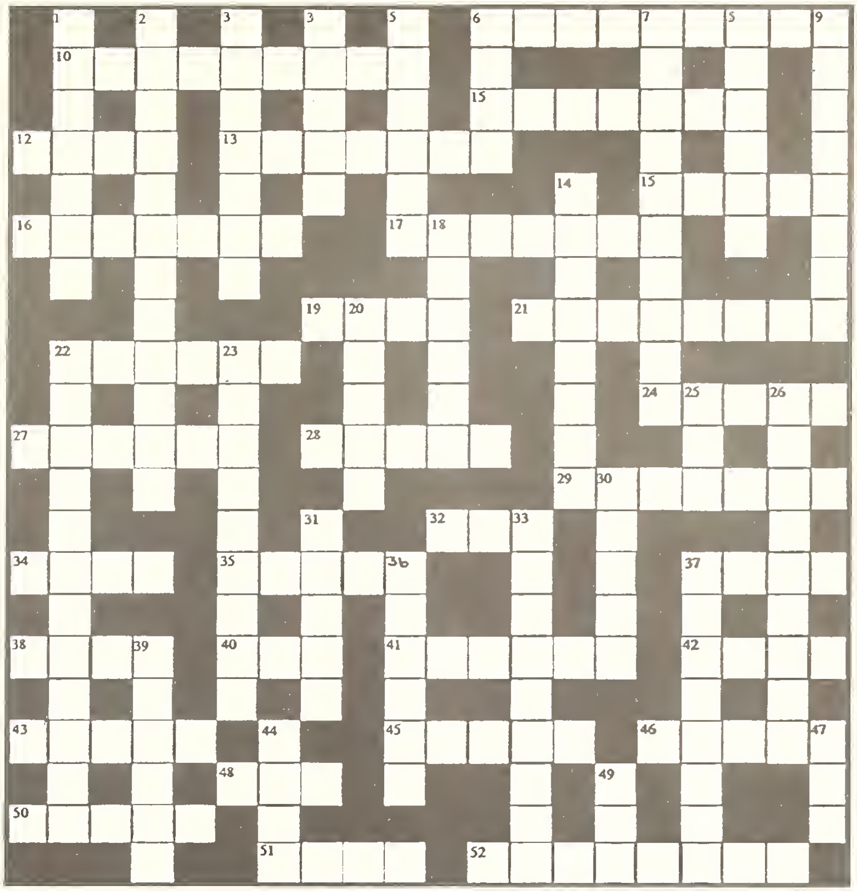
S.O.C. Prize Bird-word

To win one of the new pieces of jewellery specially designed for the SOC by John Hamilton simply complete the crossword and send it into 21 Regent Terrace, by 30th July 1993. The winner will be drawn from the correct entries.

Name:............................Address:...............................



Across
6 Mini boulder roller (9)
10 Hen pecked red-necked husband (9)
11 State of A.Craig, thanks to Bernie (7)
12 Troglodyte (4)
13 Highland loch reserve (7)
15 Frill-less female (5)
16 Nominally grouses's female neighbour (7)
17 Arboreal or residential (7)
19 Winged plover (4)
21 Spotted on mountain (8)
22 Blue vagrant (6)
24 Sunday morning conference feeling (5)
27 Dangerous place for 7 down (6)
28 Loon (5)
29 Aerial prank (7)
32 F.C.'s prize hawk (3)
34 Gull namer (4)
35 Ring a scree thrush (5)
37 Speculatively green (4)
38 Arctic of mealy red (4)
40 Birds' medium (3)
41 See 39 down (6)
42 Desired by twitchers, but not on moors (4)
43 Da former editor (5)
45 Displaying crest (5)
46 Divers (5)
48 But it appears in the clue (3)
50 Non-juv (5)
51 Khaki Campbell (4)
52 Northern duvet duck (8)

Down
1 Spug (7)
2 All France, non (anag.) (6.6)
3 Raptor more like Harold? (7)
4+6 Sweep's friends in a spin (5.4)
5 Feral pheasant (aren't they all!) (6)
6 see 4 down (4)
7 Precipitous H20 (10)
8 Spurious wader prey (6)
9 Day hunter/night hunter (5.3)
14 Occasional buntings (8)
18 Rock piper?? (6)
20 Happens at the post? (5)
22 Starling by any other name (4.8)
23 Lady's raptor (9)
25 Old brown, for example (3)
26 2-phase northerner (3.6)
30 Go fly them (5)
31 Asian blue (5)
33 Petrified conversation (9)
36 Of two evils or Sylvias (6)
37 Colloquially a rodent (8)
39+41across Short shifts (6.6)
44 Black and white (4)
47 Top club (3)
49 Little seen, occasionally heard (3)

SOC Notices

200 Club

When you receive this issue of SBN the fifth year of the 200 Club will have started. Newcomers, who must be over 18 and SOC members, are very welcome to join. Please send me a cheque or PO for £12 and you will be enrolled for the year. Notices to all existing members who pay by cheque or cash were posted in April; if you are one of the very few who did not renew, do please continue to help the SOC in this positive way and send me your cheque for the year. 'Thank you' to all who did renew.

Winners in the first quarter of 1993 were:-
January: 1st £30 – R.S. Smith, Plymouth; 2nd £20 – Mrs R. Cooper, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 – G.C. Sheppard, Stranraer.
February: 1st £30 – R. Caine, Eyemouth; 2nd £25 – Mrs A.D. Poyser, Waterhouses, Staffs.; 3rd £20 – I.L. Hopkins, Bute; 4th £10 – D.S. Omand, Reay, Caithness.
March: 1st £30 – Mr & Mrs D. Johnston, Troon; 2nd £20 – Mrs A.D. Poyser, Waterhouses, Staffs.; 3rd £10 – Mrs J.C.E. Thornber, Fort Augustus.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (089 682 2176)

Change of Recorders

Alan Vittery is taking over as recorder for Sutherland from Tony Mainwood, who has held the post since 1982, and our sincere thanks go to Tony for his many years of hard work. It is hoped that Alan will receive the same support from contributors. **Alan Vittery's address is Elmag Croft, 164 West Clyne, Brora, Sutherland KW9 6NH.**

Visit Ailsa Craig

Visit Ailsa Craig and see the spectacular Gannetry and a good chance of seeing Puffins. Also possibility of seeing Whales, Basking Sharks and Porpoises on the way across to the island.

Special Trips Day Trips for Ornithological Clubs on board M.F.V. Glorious.

Further details and prices from Mark McCrindle, 7 Harbour Street, Girvan, tel. 0465 3219.

Mr McCrindle wishes it to be known that he has no connection with the shark hunter.

Rarity Descriptions

It is very helpful if all observers of rarities send in their descriptions (preferably to the relevant county or regional recorder) as soon as possible after the sighting. It will speed up the decision-making process if notes on all major spring rarities are submitted by mid July at the latest. Please do not wait until the end of the year. Thank you. ***M J Rogers, Secretary BBRC, Bag End, Churchtown, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall, TR26 3AZ.***

Thanks

Thanks are again due to the following people for coming into 21 and helping pack the last issue of SBN. Bob & Betty Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Margaret Bell, Margaret Mowat and the late Stan Abel. Our sincere thanks go to them all.

Funny Slides?

Have you any potentially amusing slides which might be included in a feature at the annual conference?

We are looking for pictures of well known SOC characters, birds that are difficult to identify (your worst shots might be ideal), or anything that might invite a witty caption.

All slides will be returned and full credit given (where desired).

Please send ASAP to John Hamilton, Mailingsland, Peebles, EH45 8PH.

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Comfortable, basic accommodation. Sleeps 6, weekly stays Sat. – Sat. from mid March to end October.

Breeding sea birds include Puffins, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwakes, etc. Spring and Autumn migration can be spectacular. East winds in 1992 brought Golden Oriole, Honey Buzzard, Melodious, Booted, Greenish and Marsh Warblers, etc. Qualified ringers can use the Heligoland traps – non ringers welcome.

For further details write to:
Rosemary Cowper, 9 Oxgangs Road,
Edinburgh EH10 7BG
or tel. 031 445 2489.

Binding 'Scottish Birds'

We recommended in 1991 that volumes 14 and 15 should be bound in one cover, and this proved satisfactory. We shall be recommending at the appropriate time that volumes 16 and 17 (plus 'Scottish Bird Reports' if desired) should also be bound together.

If any members prefer to have volume 16 bound separately ***Riley Dunn & Wilson, Glasgow Road, Falkirk FK1 4HP (tel. 0324 21591)*** are recommended.

Branch Meetings 1993-4

As usual, the full Winter Programme will be distributed with the September mailing. Members will however want to note in advance the dates of the opening Members' Nights, which are as follows:

13 Sep: Grampian
14 Sep: Lothian
15 Sep: Fife
16 Sep: Orkney, Stewartry, Stirling, Tayside
20 Sep: Borders, Clyde
21 Sep: Highland, W Galloway
22 Sep: Ayr, Dumfries, Caithness.

Stan da Prato

It is with pleasure that we report that Council recently extended the privileges of Honorary Membership to our former President, and former Editor of this Newsletter, Stan da Prato. It is largely thanks to Stan that we all still enjoy the pleasure of belonging to our thriving Club; during a period of considerable difficulties and strains, it was due to Stan's unflagging efforts that the Scottish Ornithologists' Club emerged unscathed from those trying times. We look forward to seeing Stan's familiar and imposing figure at Club functions for many years to come.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office.

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past two years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100 birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.

Indications are that young birds move considerable distances and I would therefore be grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. Any correspondence will be acknowledged.

Andrew Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.

Greylag Geese

Greylag Geese have been caught by the Highland Ringing Group and colour ringed and dyed yellow on the wings and tail in an attempt to gain further knowledge of movements throughout the winter. Any reports of sightings would be greatly appreciated and acknowledged. Please write to **R L Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire.**

Red Kites

As part of the JNCC/RSPB re-introduction programme with the RSPB North Scotland Office handling the Scottish side of things, would members please report any sightings of Red Kites to **RSPB North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible. Please do not think somebody else may have already reported your sighting: it is better to have more than one report than none at all.

Obituary

It is with regret that we note the sudden death at the end of March of Stan Abel. Stan along with his wife Margaret gave up their time on a number of occasions to come into 21 and help pack SBN, and his willing and cheerful help will be greatly missed by all who knew him. Our condolences go to his wife and daughter.

Published by The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT © SOC
Printed by Ritchie of Edinburgh

THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish
Bird News

SEPTEMBER1993 No. 31
ISSN0268-3199

Edited by Keith Chapman, Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy

2 1993

The 1993 Breeding Season Round-up

Weather in Scotland from January to June 1993. After an early winter of average temperatures, late winter became increasingly mild. January was dull and exceptionally wet, with local heavy snow in mid month. Almost continuous SW gales prevailed, especially in the north. February was as dry as January wet - the driest for 50 years in a few eastern areas but generally cloudy and very mild. March was warm and sunny, and relatively dry in the east. April was also warm, but dull and wet, especially in the south. Both May and June were dry with average temperatures, but a high percentage of E winds in May kept the east coast cool and dull, and a heavy fall of snow over much of Scotland in mid-May caused a significant number of species to fail. The west enjoying the best weather, until early July.

Raptors and Owls

On the whole most raptor and owl species appear to have had a poor season, although there are a few exceptions. The number of Osprey pairs located has increased again this year, but breeding success appears more protracted than normal with some pairs just hatching whilst others are at the fledging stage, although brood sizes in some cases appear to be lower than normal. For the first time in many years no known clutches have been stolen, although fishing line was noted as the cause of failure at 3 sites and Pine Martens responsible for failure at a further 2 sites. Golden Eagles were present in good numbers in the North-west although the breeding success is not known as yet, elsewhere reports range from good to poor and in one area it is the first time for a quarter of a century that two pairs fledged 1 young each. The story for Peregrines is fairly depressing with many failures due to the weather conditions the only exceptions being Central Scotland and Orkney where 3 pairs reared young compared to none in 1992. Buzzards would appear to be doing fairly well in the Borders and those feeding on Rabbits in Easter Ross succeeded in rearing large broods, whilst those feeding on voles or birds struggled to rear single chicks. Hen Harriers have had the worst season for a number of years, up to a 50% decrease on the number of young being reared. In one study area containing 19 pairs only 3 pairs succeeded in rearing young at the first attempt, and some complete clutches had been abandoned by the birds. Some repeat clutches have been noted, but these are generally much smaller and with a lower survival rate. A higher than normal bias towards fledgling females is also noted in Tayside this year.

Hen Merlin on eggs *Arthur Gilpin*

No Harriers bred in Wigtownshire for the first time since 1968 and in Orkney it is recorded as the worst year on record. However, also in Orkney Merlins reached the highest occupation for many years, but many failures both early and late in the season would tie in with the data for much of Scotland, in that it was a extremely poor year and in the Lothians a female was found dead on her nest during May just after the heavy snowfall; a post mortem examination revealed she had died of hypothermia! The only exception here appears to be from south-west Scotland with 10/20 successful pairs being located along a forest edge. Mixed fortunes for the Ayrshire Kestrel study area, with heavy losses in mid season due to the heavy rain and snow, but birds that saw out the bad weather have done quite well. The only other report came from the Lochalsh area and here Kestrels appear to be scarcer than normal.

Although not strictly a raptor Ravens appear to have done quite well in central Scotland. Bad weather in May does not seem to matter to much to them, and at least one brood of three fledged. However, in Orkney they have had the poorest year since the study began 10 years ago.

Tawny Owls have fared badly in most areas, but in Blairgowrie 7 pairs in a nest box scheme and one in an old Pigeon nest reared a total of 13 owlets although 2 are known to succumbed. The only report of Long Eared Owls was that of 3 pairs in Easter Ross which all failed at the small chick stage and a vole shortage is the likely cause, as is the case with Short Eared Owls which also appear to be very thin on the ground this year. The story with Barn Owls is slightly different and the outcome will not be known for some time. Many losses early on in the season have resulted in relays and clutches of 6/7 have been found in south-west Scotland in late May/June, so we can only hope that they will be successful this time round.

A Raven *Jack Orchel*

Gamebirds

Numbers of Blackcock both at leks and the number of leks appear to be down in the Perthshire study area this year! Red Grouse have also had a poor season due to inclement weather conditions and a number of estates are believed to have cancelled the famous 12th August this year.

Seabirds

At North Sutor, Cormorants, Shags and Auks all did well with numbers stable if not increasing, and in Orkney cliff nesting seabirds appear to have had a reasonable season, as was the case on the Isle of May for Auks and Gulls at least. The same can not be said for Shags on the Forth Islands, were many pairs did not lay at all, and numbers on some islands are about half. On the Isle of May it is suspected that any successful young will not become independent until September or October. Kittiewakes have also had a disastrous season and again on the Isle of May c7000 pairs fledged only a couple of hundred chicks between them. Puffins continue to expand their range in the Forth but fewer birds noted in the Outer Forth. Common and Arctic Terns suffered heavy losses although the number of pairs on the Isle of May was the highest count in recent years at 700 pairs but with only about 50 chicks being successfully reared. Most of the gull species did reasonably well with the exception of Common Gull in N Sutor wheree a complete failure to rear any chicks was noted.

Waders

In most of Scotland Curlews, Oystercatcher, and Lapwing had a very poor season, mainly due to the adverse weather conditions, i.e. heavy rain and late snow falls. One river shingle nesting Oystercatcher had its nest washed out at least 3 times, and it was noted that many birds had returned to the Solway estuary by early June. In some areas re-lays have done slightly better , and it is noted in Tayside that set-aside is proving valuable cover for many wader chicks. In Orkney it has been a bumper year for Curlews and Redshanks, but Lapwing success has been extremely patchy. Set-aside has also proved to be worthwhile with a 300% increase in Ringed Plover on a farmland CBC plot in Angus. Common Sandpipers have also fared badly in most areas, but have been recorded in good numbers in Grampian especially in new areas well into the hills on small burns. The only report of Woodcock also came from Tayside with a pair in a woodland CBC for the first time. Golden Plovers have also been noted as decreasing in numbers, with poor breeding success on grouse moors in Grampian.

Wildfowl

The only two reports of Eider show just how different areas can contradict each other. At Loch Alsh and Loch Duich in the west the numbers of Eider are considerably lower the usual, while at Nigg in the east Eiders are still showing an increase in numbers and hatching success of nests was high. Hole nesting species such as Shelduck on the Solway have done well, with good numbers of birds being seen. Goldeneye in Strathspey had a very extended nesting season with many young. 1st year females were noted inspecting potential nest sites in boxes, chimneys and trees, and one young female came down the chimney of a house. It was unhurt and released complete with a shiny new ring, and in another area of Strathspey a female hatched 11 young from a box on 24th May, and two weeks later another female was incubating a fresh clutch of eggs in the same box; this is the first time this has been known in Scotland. No broods of Goosanders have been reported.

Reports of Mallard and Tufted Duck range from numbers well down and poor breeding success to average and done well. Some broods of young Mallard were noted at the end of June which is very late. Behaviour suggests that a pair of Garganey bred in one area this year, but no definite proof as yet. Ruddy Duck continue to expand their range in Scotland with breeding now in Fife. Only one record of breeding Pochard this year?

Mute Swans also appear to have slightly smaller broods this year, and it is feared that a number of nests were washed out early in the season. A female reared 5 cygnets single handed in Tayside following the death of the cob.

Lapwing incubating in the snow
Bobby Tulloch

Waterside Birds

Moorhen numbers are reported down by 25% on the 1992 level in Angus. Dippers, Grey Wagtails and Pied Wagtails have also fared very badly due to fluctuating water levels, with many nests being washed out, the only exception being a 100% increase in Grey Wagtail in Angus. .

Herons in Easter Ross did well at the 2 monitored colonies with all nests producing young.

Warblers

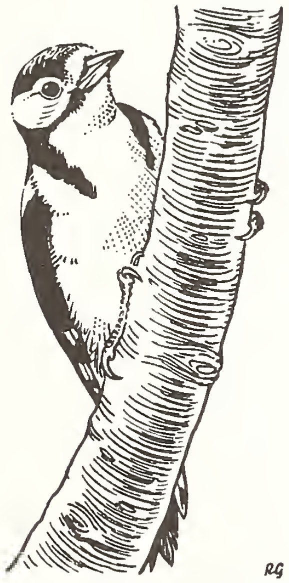
No significant changes have been noted with the Warbler species and in most areas good numbers have been reported, with the exception of South-west Scotland, Easter Ross and South-east Sutherland, although Wood Warbler seem to be expanding into marginal habitats in Galloway. Some declines could be due to habitat changes, and a possible increase in Blackcap and Chiffchaff could be due to milder winters.

Hirundines

Hirundines on the whole appear to be having a mixed season, with an early return passage of Swifts noted in South-west Scotland; who can blame them? Swallows would appear to be later in producing 1st broods than normal and in some areas fledging success is considerably reduced. Will any go on to try 2nd broods? House Martins have declined for the second year running in Lothian and Borders, but an increase was noted again in west Central Scotland. Sand Martin numbers are difficult to judge - in some areas more birds have been seen but the number of nests found is down on previous years.

Summer Migrants (not previously covered)

Another good year for Cuckoos at Inversnaid RSPB reserve with 8/9 calling males located on the reserve, but numbers have dropped from 3/4 pairs in 1992 to only 1 pair in 1993 in a CBC in Tayside. The only report of Quail came from the Borders with only one calling bird reported. In a study area in Angus Ring Ouzels appear in similar numbers to 1992. Although the dates for first eggs are on average 10 days earlier, brood sizes and fledging success is comparable with 1992. This compares favourably with observations in some other areas, the only exception being North-west Scotland. Redstarts are also scarce in the Lochalsh area, but have been reported as being in good numbers in Central and Easter Ross, with birds being seen in new areas, but the cold wet weather appears to have reduced the breeding success in the later. Pied Flycatchers came in in good numbers in the Glentrool area, and a mean clutch size of 7 was the highest in 16 years. Later broods did not do so well. In Central the report is also good. Spotted Flycatchers on the other hand are not doing so well, with many reports of far fewer to no birds being seen. Whinchats in Lothian are recorded as being noticeably down, with Wheatears having poor fledging success; this is contradicted in Angus wherethe report is of reasonable numbers of fledged Wheatears being seen. Stonechats on the other hand appear to be increasing their range, with more birds being seen in some areas.



Great Spotted Woodpecker Robert Gillmor

Other Songbirds

It has been noticed by a few observers that the number of Meadow Pipits in the hills this year appear to be less with fewer fledged young being seen, as is also the case with Skylark. Crossbills have had a good year on Speyside and one brood of c2day old young was found on 31st March, while in South-west Scotland some Crossbills were back in plantations with small spruce cone crops. An influx of Siskin was also noted during March and April in South-west Scotland. In contrast Redpoll numbers are being reported well down on previous years!. Mistle Thrushes are still scarce in Central, but Song Thrush appear to be holding their own. In Tayside 2 pairs of Corn Bunting have been recorded, for the first time since 1984 at this particular site.

A long term study of Tree Sparrow numbers in Perthshire shows the number of fledged young to be comparable to 1992, although at the time of writing no 3rd clutches had been attempted this year. Great and Blue Tits in this area have been fairly successful with broods of up to 11 being reared, despite the cold, wet weather. This is not reflected in Easter Ross, or Borders.

Goldcrests on one CBC plot show a decline of 60% on 1992. Green Woodpeckers in Borders appear to be missing from a few usual sites, but difficulty in locating birds could have an effect. More calling birds were noticed however in parts of Perthshire. Great Spotted Woodpecker was one of the more numerous species reported by one observer in South-west Scotland.

Thanks are again due to the following people without whose help this report would not be possible:

Bruce Anderson, David Arthur, Keith Brockie, Allan Brown, John Callandine, Brian Cosnette, Roy Dennis, R C Dickson, Andrew Dowell, Keith Duncan, Colin Edwards, Norman Elkins, Ian Francis, Steve Fulford, Peter Gordon, Sandra Hacker, Mike Harris, Mark Holling, A Joss, Eric Meek, Ray Murray, D Macdonald, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Stan da Prato, Henry Robb, Gordon Riddle, Chris Rollie, Malcolm Ross, Geoff Shaw, Stan & Marion Shimeld, Bob & Betty Smith, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Swann, Mike Trubridge and Sarah Wanless.

As always we stress that fieldworkers' first impressions are not to be interpreted as the definitive account of the season for 1993. That comes later when the appropriate bodies have analysed all the data. Many of the contributors to the summary you have just read are participants in the Common Bird Census or the Waterways Bird Survey organised by the BTO with backing from SNH, or people doing a specific study on certain species.

Sylvia Laing

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Red Kite Update

In 1992 a pair of Red Kites bred in Scotland for the first time in over a century and the pair fledged one young.

In 1993 the joint JNCC/RSPB project moved one large step forward with the discovery of no fewer that 5 nests in the Highlands. It is pleasing to report that seven young Kites have now fledged this year. These Scottish bred birds will augment the twenty four birds to be released in August, as the final phase of the experimental reintroduction programme.

The 1993 Red Kites will be carrying red patagial wing tags with white letter or numbers. The imported Kites will be fitted with tail mounted radio tags. The RSPB is interested in all Kite sightings, SOC members telephoning the North Scotland Regional Office with sightings can be provided with details on the individual Kite concerned. Birds have now been recorded in all areas of Scotland and SOC members should be aware of the increased likelihood of observing the species, particularly in the kind of areas also favoured by Buzzards.

Duncan Orr-Ewing

Deeside Wigeon

A small research grant from the SOC has assisted in the monitoring of a Wigeon breeding population in Deeside, Grampian. 1993 has been the poorest (and strangest) season yet since observations began in 1989.

The Wigeon arrived in spring as normal with 10 pairs (including a female duckling ringed in 1992) dispersed around the study area prior to egg laying. At this stage several pairs disappeared completely leaving a maximum of 5 drakes during the incubation period.

Only 4 breeding females were confirmed. One nest was washed out by torrential rain, one nest hatched 9 ducklings but neither the female nor brood were seen again and broods of 2 and 1 ducklings were observed at the nursery area.

By early July all adult birds had left the study area leaving the one surviving duckling to fledge alone.

To cap a very peculiar season our most loyal female (orange ring on left leg), which had nested within 20m in the past three seasons, hung around the study area throughout the breeding season but did not appear to even attempt nesting.

The abnormally wet spring appears to have contributed significantly to a very poor breeding season for the Wigeon. Who says ducks like water?

Raymond & Judy Duncan

Bird-eating Buzzards

Whenever I ring a brood of Buzzards I always rummage through the nest to see what prey remains have been left. Buzzards are very opportunistic feeders and are known to take a wide range of mainly mammal prey. During a 13 year study of Buzzards in Glen Urquhart I found the remains of 695 birds of 50 different species in Buzzard nests. However, whilst ringing a brood of two Buzzards on the 14th of June in a small pine wood above the sea cliffs at Castle Craig by the North Sutor of Cromarty even I was surprised by the variety of bird prey remains in the particular nest. On the nest were the well eaten remains of a large Great Black-backed Gull chick and the half eaten remains of a Crow. amongst the nest linings I found clumps of feathers belonging to a Meadow Pipit, a Chaffinch and a juvenile Robin, all fairly typical Buzzard prey. More unusual were Wren and Swallow. this is the first time I have recorded a Buzzard eating a Swallow. it makes one wonder at the agility of a Buzzard that it could catch elusive prey like Swallows and Wrens. One also wonders why they bother! The food value in a Wren must scarcely equal the energy used up to catch it, especially when larger prey appears to be available. Maybe it's just a tasty snack. I once found the remains of a Swallow in a Tawny Owl box at Drumnadrochit. I assumed that that particular bird had maybe been caught whilst roosting.

Bob Swann

Tawny Owl *David Mitchell*

Will some birds incubate anything?

In past years on Canna single Herring Gull eggs have been found amongst Eider clutches and Eider eggs in Herring Gull nests, all being diligently incubated by the foster parent. This year at Nigg on the Cromarty Firth similar mixed clutches were observed involving Arctic Terns. One was incubating two Ringed Plover eggs along with its own two, whilst another was rather lopsidedly incubating an Oystercatcher egg along with two tern eggs. In most of these cases it appears that the parents manage to hatch their own eggs but not the 'fostered' ones.

In 1989 in Glen Urquhart, by Loch Ness a female Goldeneye laid 5 eggs in one of my owl boxes before being ousted by a Goosander which added 12 of her own eggs. She successfully incubated and hatched all 17 eggs, though none of the young Goldeneye chicks were subsequently located.

The least chance of hatching anything went to another female Eider, this time at Nigg. When its nest was discovered on 25th May all it was found to contain was a small plastic juice bottle. It quickly hurried back on to its nest after having been disturbed. On the 7th June it was still incubating its bottle but by the 20th had given up its forlorn task.

Bob Swann

Attempted Piracy by Goshawk on male Hen Harrier

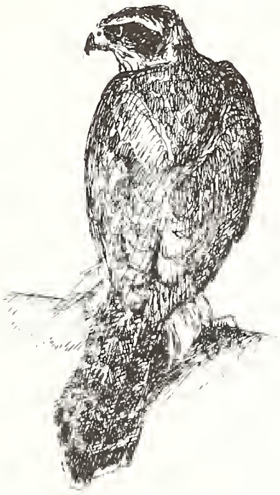
On the 21st May, on a well keepered, show-piece grouse moor in southwest Scotland, Ian and I were observing a Hen Harrier nest site.

On a previous visit, Ian had identified a white wing tag on the left wing of the resident male. This indicated that it was a 1990 male, and we were anxious to identify the right wing tag colour and if possible the letter or number. The former would identify the region in which it was reared, the latter the specific nest.

The nest was in a large patch of rank heather on the south facing slope of a steep sided glen through which a large burn flowed. It was an ideal location for 'watching'.

Armed with telescopes, binoculars and a 'big piece', we had quietly slipped down out of the mist that was covering the tops. We positioned ourselves opposite, but slightly higher than the incubating female.

Then came the nerve-racking moments every harrier watcher dreads - had she seen us? An unnecessary worry in this instance. A quick look through the binoculars revealed that she was still on the nest. No alarm calling could be heard. With slow movements we engaged the telescopes. Luck was with us, she was sitting facing away from us and into the hill. She hadn't seen us and, with the male away we could finally relax and await his return. It was now 12.30, and we waited patiently, until at 13.35 our patience was rewarded, a grey male headed down the glen. This was what we had been waiting for. The female rose, food calling; but he ignored her, carrying on through the glen and out of sight. We had caught good views of him; he was not the resident male and had no wing tags, nor did he appear to be carrying food.



Goshawk *Doug Weir*

The female harrier was no lady, she didn't go back on the nest straight away, but instead stretched her wings and flew low down the valley, though never out of sight of the nest. A quick look at the nest through the scope revealed four to five eggs. On returning, she overflew the nest by forty yards, landing on some burnt heather. There she sat for a further 2 minutes before flying over the nest again and landing on a bare patch of hill thirty yards from the nest. Her behaviour at first suggested that we'd been discovered. However, after a couple more 'dummy' runs she was back on the nest.

Looking at her through the scopes, we were relieved to see that, although looking in our direction across the glen, she was seemingly quite settled.

Further down the glen we could hear the shepherdess working her dogs; moving ewes in our direction. How would the sitting bird react? Very well as it turned out; even although the sheep passed within 200 yards on their way to higher ground, she sat unperturbed. She must have grown accustomed to the everyday working sounds of the hill.

The light was improving, bright and without the occasional May haze. We could clearly see the dark eyes; a young female, probably breeding for the first time.

Time passed in silence - we'd long run out of interesting snippets to exchange. As harrier enthusiasts we knew we were in the middle of that 'dead period' between 13.00 and 17.00 when few prey deliveries are made to incubating females. However, at 13.40, the female stood on the rim of the nest yickering. What was up? We had been losing concentration. Now alerted, we strained to see what was wrong. A large brownish bird passed in front of the nest. Do you get Sparrowhawks that big? no - it was a Goshawk that landed fifty yards from the nest, slightly higher up and possibly out of sight of the sitting harrier, who never took to the air.

Things settled down again; the female back to incubating, Ian and I to having a good look at the 'Gos' through the telescopes, taking turns so as not to miss the male harrier's approach. Time passed, the 'Gos' hadn't moved since landing, the female harrier only throwing cursory glances in his direction.

At 16.30 we sighted the male carrying food descending down the glen towards the nest. Just before levelling with the nest the 'Gos' met him, giving him such a fright that he dropped the prey early. The female was off the nest like a rocket, catching it before it hit the ground and off up the hill with prize - 'good on you'.

A brief skirmish ensued between the 'Gos' and the male harrier. Finally, realising the free meal was gone, the 'Gos' departed, flying slowly down the glen and out of sight.

The male harrier landed higher up the opposite hillside, facing into a slight breeze, perfect for observation and possible identification. We hurried to get the scopes focussed, fearing all the while he might fly off. We both saw the red tag on the right wing, "It's an 'L'" said Ian. Luckily the harrier stayed put long enough for me to confirm this. Surprisingly we had both noticed the white tag first, the red proving more difficult to locate. You would have thought the reverse would have been the case.

By now the female was back settled on the nest. Before leaving we made a quick nest inspection, discovering five eggs.

There was no doubt in our minds that the Goshawk, an immature male, had sat without making a move for nearly 2 hours, in the hope of a free meal by intercepting the food pass between the harriers. Only the smartness of the female denied him this.

Ricky Gladwell & Ian Millar

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A Rum Do - An account of the Stirling Branch excursion 4/7 June 1993

The MacBrynes crew preparing the 0500 ferry on Friday 4th June for its departure from Mallaig to the Small Isles could not have been aware of the traumas afflicting some of their potential passengers; and if they had, they would most likely have contemplated philosophically that those were just typical of the adventures enjoyed by every boatload of island goers. There was Cliff Henty, abandoned in mid-snooze in a lay-by by fellow voyagers, who woke only just in time to scramble to the quay-side with an arm load of disassorted belongings. And our representative from headquarters, sent to make sure the SOC's codes of birdwatching ethics were observed by all, had the misfortune to collide with a deer not far from his destination. Fortunately for him he managed to make the deadline, but unfortunately for the rest of us did not have the strength to put the carcase in the back of the car, as a bit of venison would have been a welcome alternative to the chicken that was served up for supper on our first night.

Our destination was the island of Rum, managed since 1957 as a nature reserve by the NCC and latterly SNH, and the hostel at the rear of Kinloch Castle was to be our home for the next three days. There was another minor panic at point of departure when it was realised that the Merries were not on board, but they had made special arrangements with MacBraynes (ie by buying a ticket) to be taken on board at Canna, where they had spent four days in a tent in preference to driving overnight from Glasgow for a 5am start.

So it was that the ship docked at Canna at 0730, listing heavily to starboard with watchers scanning the quayside for the missing members, and then partly retraced its steps round the north side of Rum to anchor in Kinloch Bay. This short sea passage was notable for the thousands of Manx Shearwaters cleaving through the wavetops as they went out to sea after their overnight shift change on the mountain tops of Rum. To enliven things a bit there was the occasional glimpse of Cory's Shearwater, greyer and heavier than the Manx.

There were 27 of us, a fact which had been clearly explained to the hostel management by our secretary Ian Wilson. However the accommodation did not quite match up to this number, giving him scope to exercise his negotiating skills. All was amicably settled however, and despite a certain amount of musical beds over the ensuing nights everybody was comfortably housed.

The weather gave us a salutary warning at midday with a tremendous downpour. Most people had the sense to have lunch or a quiet kip, and the afternoon allowed initial exploration of our environs. Swallows, who are not normally numerous on Rum, were very obvious, hawking low through the trees by the Kinloch River. Not so obvious was the lone Corncrake that had been reported in the farm fields the day before. Only Douglas and Mary Mason were fortunate to hear it late on Friday evening.

Stonechat families dotted the moors. Higher up piping Golden Plovers exercised parental care, and drumming Snipe proclaimed their territorial rights. Common Sandpipers were surprisingly few. The Sea Eagles for which Rum is now famous have ungratefully deserted their foster home and, despite many eyes being strained for glimpses of them, the only ones seen by party members were two sightings by the Merries on Canna. There are however three pairs of Golden Eagles on Rum and at least one of these was seen to have what appeared to be downy young in a nest low down above the sea.

Rum is perhaps richer in geological phenomena than in flora and fauna, and it was to the hills that some members turned their attentions, many people traversing both Hallival and Askival, and two, hardy or mad, depending on your point of view, scrambling over the five main peaks in a single cloud-shrouded day, accompanied by croaking and perhaps optimistic Ravens. The ornithological output of this exercise, in all senses of the word, was an opinion that 100,000 was a gross under estimate of the number of Shearwater pairs inhabiting Hallival, Askival and Trallival, and that there could be up to ten times that number. Three days is far too short a time to give proper attention to an island the size and ruggedness of Rum, and thus it was that, coupled with the rival attractions of a slide show one night and a ceilidh the next night, only Mike, the man from head office, was sufficiently motivated to brave the lashing rain of the third evening to ascend to the Shearwater slopes to witness the shift change. In typical graphic style he described the experience as sounding like a cross between a pig-sty and a farm-yard.

West and south-west were the other two main directions for exploration, as the north section of the island round Kilmory was out of bounds to allow the Red Deer to have their calves in peace. Halfway up the road to Harris a lone SNH watcher sheltering behind a hummock, rather like a motorway policeman looking for transgressors, kept vigil across the valley. Facing due west, Harris is where the mausoleum housing the remains of former owners of the castle are interred. It used to be the main centre of population, and those who have sampled the midge armies of Kinloch Bay will appreciate the wisdom of this choice. The

Red-throated Diver *Sidney Clark*

mausoleum is planted right amongst the remains of the lazy beds of former crofters, who left the island en masse in the early 19th century bound for the New World, at the insistence of the then owner, Lord Salisbury, who wished to farm sheep. A herd of Highland cattle is kept here now to prevent the sweet grass being overtaken by coarse. Here was found one of the few pairs of Wheatears.

North of Harris is the curve of Orval and Bloodstone Hill, which plunges to the sea in massive cliffs emblazoned with a profusion of wild flowers. An eagle soaring over the outline of Canna and a group of deer grazing on the fertile lower slopes contributed to the perfect Hebridean picture. Hoodies, Meadow Pipits and a few Curlews predictably completed the moorland tally.

Red-Throated Divers nest in the hill lochs, and a nest of one was found, though most of the pairs nest in the forbidden Kilmory ground. Rum was second only to London in having a public electricity supply early this century and the watercourses that made this possible were the best places to see Dippers. Everyone saw a Heron or two, but there is only one known nest, and that close to Kinloch village.

In fact, despite the vast wild rugged hinterland, most of the variety of bird life is to be found within the Kinloch area, amongst the village, farmland and extensive planted woodland. This is where we all spent most time amid the continual chorusing of Song Thrushes, Blackbird, Wrens and Cuckoos. Chaffinches and Willow Warblers were insistent but less penetrating, with lesser birds such as Whitethroat, Grasshopper Warblers, Wood Warbler, Chiffchaff and Siskin only managing to be noticed by a few observers. Mike Trubridge, true professional that he is, cleaned up on most of the small birds, adding Redpoll, that nobody else had seen, and a roding Woodcock at eventide. Robin youngsters were everywhere, Spotted Flycatchers were just settling in, and the normal residents of mainland woodlands that were represented here, albeit in small numbers, were Blue, Coal and Long-tailed Tits and Dunnocks. Add to these a handsome pair of Bullfinches tame and close. Wood Pigeons were also present, and one of these may have been what was reported as a possible Jay, for Jays have never been seen here before. Their relatives the Collared Doves hung around the farm.

The castle, an extravaganza built in 1901 by the man who was at one time the second richest in Britain, contains much to marvel at. The front of the castle is now run as a first class hotel, in contrast to the hostel accommodation at the rear. We were invited to view it for a fee on Sunday morning, but since it was a fine day few did so. The Wilsons circumnavigated this dilemma by choosing to spend the last night in the luxury of a four poster bedroom on the other side, thus getting the tour thrown in for free. What some folk will do to save a pound or two! Pied Wagtails also inhabited the castle, but whether in the hotel side or hostel side was not clear.

Loch Screesort at Kinloch we saw both from shore and boat. Here matronly Eiders coached their broods and Oystercatchers shouted in a state of continual alarm. Mallards and Mergansers gathered in small quiet groups. A few Tysties flashed their white armbands at us. Visiting gulls of four species investigated the smoking refuse dump on the north shore and a few Common Terns rested awhile on a mooring buoy. Not far away a family of Greylag Geese were shepherding their brood. A bonus at our embarkation was a lone Buzzard hovering over the north side of the bay. They are in short supply on Rum due to the lack of rodents (barring rats, but then it was near the refuse dump!).

Most of the seabird colonies on Rum are small and out-of-the-way and so our records of seabirds were mainly from the boat. As well as Fulmar, Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin , plunging Gannet and diving Shag, one or two Stormy Petrels were seen nearer to Skye.

Finally it falls to me, the first secretary of the Stirling Branch of the SOC, to thank and congratulate the latest, Ian Wilson, for arranging what must be one of the most ambitious and also successful excursions the branch has run. Well done, Ian: I look forward to the next event.

David Merrie

SOC Surveys

Members will be aware of the long-standing and close relationship between the SOC and the BTO over national surveys either of individual species or atlas projects. This has resulted in the SOC membership providing invaluable contributions to the coverage of Scotland for these surveys. Many members contribute also to the National Waterfowl Counts (WWT) and Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (RSPB/BTO)

It is evident however that some BTO surveys are of either little relevance to Scotland or involve only a small proportion of the membership and/or Scottish fieldworkers. In this regard therefore the Surveys and Research Committee has been considering whether or not the SOC should take a more prominent role in organising its own surveys, both of breeding and wintering birds.

Co-ordinated national surveys are of some value but it is often difficult to obtain full coverage (this was not obtained even with a relatively easy species such as the Mute Swan) and it is necessary to find someone willing to take on the organisation. Although there are relatively few species which could be examined in a Scottish context only there would appear to be plenty of scope for species of local interest to be surveyed; this may enable several species to be surveyed within different parts of Scotland. This would resolve also the problems of fieldworkers having to undertake survey work in areas where there was little likelihood of finding the species the subject of the survey. The aim would be to obtain good coverage for monitoring purposes in certain areas of the country and involve as many club members as possible in fieldwork.

It may be appropriate for surveys to take place of groups of birds such as Finches or Buntings within areas which have good numbers of such species. The New Breeding Atlas may be a good starting point for the identification of potential local surveys (eg. Grey Partridge, Magpie, Jay, Green Woodpecker and Crested Tit). After an initial pilot project a survey could then be expanded into other areas. The Black-headed Gull may be an appropriate species in this respect and a pilot survey would enable feedback to occur on the value of undertaking a particular survey at a broader scale and enable methodology and instructions to be refined.

Surveys therefore could support local needs and it may be possible for surveys undertaken by Branches in some areas at present (Lothian, Borders and Clyde are particularly active in this respect) forming the basis of more extensive surveys if appropriate.

The S & R Committee would see its role as possibly identifying and directing survey effort to certain species and areas and encouraging co-ordination with Branches where necessary. Advice could be given also on survey methodology and analysis and presentation of results.

I would be pleased therefore to receive the views of the membership on the potential role of the SOC and its Branches in survey organisation, both for summer and winter surveys. All responses will be considered by the S & R Committee in deciding upon the policy to follow for greater involvement of the Club and its membership in survey activity of benefit to Scottish birds.

Allan W Brown

Chairman, Surveys & Research Committee, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife. KY15 4UG

RECENT REPORTS

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports via local recorders to **Angus Murray, 14 Midton Road, Ayr KA7 2SF**, at the end of March, June, September and December. The period April to June is covered here.*

4 **White-billed Divers** were reported in April and May; 2 in Orkney, 1 in Shetland and 1 in the Solway Firth. The **Black-browed Albatross** returned to Hermaness, Unst on 7th April and was present on and off throughout the period. An adult **Night Heron** at Kilmardinning Loch, Bearsden on 24th April, however like most which turn up in Scotland, carries the "of unknown origin" caveat whilst perhaps only 2 or 3 individual **Little Egrets** were involved in 7 sightings in May and June in Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire, Lothian, WWT Caerlaverock, Baron's Haugh and Endrick Mouth. There were 3 reports of **White Storks** between the 1st-13th May, flyovers in Dumfries and Galloway and Islay and 1 at Hillend Moss, Lanarkshire. A **Spoonbill** was at Tyninghame on 19th May with 2 at Skinflats 4 days later.

The most significant wildfowl reports included an immature drake **Lesser Scaup** at Loch of Spiggie, Shetland (9th/13th May), the 2nd Scottish record, a drake **Blue-winged Teal** at Loch Fleet on 29th April, a drake **Black Scoter** at Dornoch in April and a **Ruddy Shelduck** presumably of feral origin in Morayshire. A good spring for **Garganey** with perhaps as many as 40 reported from all over Scotland. The 3 best raptors of the period were the 2 male **Montagu's Harriers** at Boddam, Aberdeenshire and Easthaven, Angus in the last week of May and the white-phase **Gyr Falcon** at Cairngorm on 14th April. A **Crane** was on Fair Isle in mid May, though more intriguing was the report of a **Demoiselle Crane** on Tiree, a potential first for Britain.

2 **Avocets** were in Aberdeenshire in early May as well as in Orkney in April, with **Little Ringed Plover** at Aberdeen, Ayrshire and Renfrewshire whilst a true Scottish rarity, a **Kentish Plover** was at Tyninghame on 1st/3rd May and was the 2nd Lothian record. 3 **Temminck's Stints** were reported in Ayrshire, Aberdeenshire and Caithness whilst between the 3rd/30th May the Uists had a **Broad-billed Sandpiper, American Golden Plover** and **Pectoral Sandpiper** and a **Semi-palmated Sandpiper** on Stronsay on 7th/8th June is only the 2nd Scottish record.

The highest ever single day count of **Long-tailed Skuas** in Britain was the 1268 which passed Balranald on 18th May whilst paradoxically 52 **Pomarine Skua's** also past Balranald was the highest count. Of the 4/5 **Ring-billed Gulls**, all in April, singles were on South Uist and Shetland with perhaps 2/3 adults in Lothian. Single adult **Yellow-legged Gulls** were in Fife and Ayrshire. A **White-winged Black Tern** was at Spynie Loch, Morayshire on 15th May with one the day after at St Abbs Head. The **Lesser Crested Tern**, which normally summers on the Farne Islands, put in its third appearance in Scotland. 2 or 3 **Snowy Owls** were in the Western Isles with only 1 in Shetland and 1 also seen in Sutherland. A splash of colour was provided by the **Bee-eaters** in Aberdeenshire, Skye and on Noss, Shetland and **Hoopoes** on Islay, Fetlar, West Lothian and an obliging long-staying bird in Dundee.

Wryneck *Andrew Ramsay*

Scarcities reported in good numbers included **Wryneck, Red-backed Shrikes, Common Rosefinches** and **Bluethroats.** Of the last named the main arrival was from the 10th May with good numbers in North-east Scotland, Orkney and Shetland though the peak count was 15 on Isle of May on 12th. North Ronaldsay and Fair Isle both recorded **Short-toed** and **Shore Lark** with singles of the latter also on Whalsay and at Cruden Bay and another **Short-toed** on Isle of May. Of the 2 **Woodlarks** 1 was at St Abbs in early April and the other in Angus in late June. A good find was an **Alpine Swift** near the Mull of Kintyre on 15th April as was a **Red-rumped Swallow** at Loch of Harray, Orkney on 16th June. A **Black-bellied Dipper** was on Fair Isle on 7th April.

Perhaps the highlights of the spring were amongst the Warblers, with rare Acrocephalus in the form of a **Blyth's Reed** on North Ronaldsay on 19th May, a **Great Reed** at Geosetter, Shetland and amongst the **Marsh Warblers** reported, 1 at Muchalls was the 1st record for North-east Scotland. Fair Isle had both **Savi's** and **River Warblers** with Orkney having a **Bonelli's Warbler** on Rousay on 17th May and a **Melodious Warbler** on Westray on 10th June. Orkney also recorded 12 **Icterine Warblers** with 4 in Shetland and 1 at St Abbs. Of the 6 **Subalpine Warblers,** 4 were in Shetland with the others on South Uist and at Rattray Head, whilst Rattray also had a **Greenish Warbler** on 12th May with another at Wormiston, Fife on 13/14th May. St Abbs produced the best warbler however with a male **Marmora's** from 23rd/27th May the first record for Scotland and only the 3rd in Britain.

The 3 **Golden Orioles** reported were all in Shetland. About half of the 20 **Great Grey Shrikes** reported were in Orkney with 2 **Lesser Grey Shrikes** reported on Fair Isle and at Scarfskerry, Caithness and a **Woodchat Shrike** at Coldingham, Berwickshire briefly on 24th May. 2 **Arctic Redpolls** were on Fair Isle in May whilst more exotic and controversial were the male **Pallas's Rosefinch** on Isle of May 11th/24th April and **Long-tailed Rosefinches** at St. Abbs and Easthaven, Angus during May. With both species the escape likelihood is high and vagrancy potential low but worth seeing nonetheless. Also with a high escape probability was a male **Red Headed Bunting** on Fair Isle on 23/24th May. Better credentialswere offered by a male **Black Headed Bunting** on Islay. Other rare Buntings came in the shape of **Ortolans** on St Kilda, North Ronaldsay and Sumburgh, Shetland, **Littles** at St. Abbs and Newbugh, Aberdeenshire and **Rustics** at St. Abbs, Shetland (2) , Isle of May (2), North Ronaldsay and Rattray Head.

Angus Murray

*Many of the above records were featured on Birdline Scotland an information service for Scottish Birdwatchers updated several times daily on **0891 700234** (calls charged at 36p/min. cheap rate, 48p/ min. at other times incls VAT). To phone in sightings please telephone **(0292 611994)** 24hr. answerphone service.*

Great Crested Grebes on Kilconquhar Loch

After many years of poor breeding success, Great Crested Grebes had a magnificent breeding season at Kilconquhar Loch in 1992 with 16 pairs producing 29 young.

I have monitored the loch with regular visits since 1987 and until 1992 had only seen 2 pairs successfully rear young even though 5 pairs of Great Crested Grebes were present during the summer months. The failure of birds to produce young was probably down to lack of available food. In the late summer of 1991 the loch side shallows abounded with small fry and a pair of late nesting Great Crested Grebes successfully reared 3 young, bringing them out of the nest on 30th August.

Early in 1992 during milder weather the loch side shallows abounded with thousands upon thousands of sticklebacks. 4 pairs of Great Crested Grebes were already performing their charming displays by 23rd February. Early May showed an increase to 6 pairs then 7 pairs by 25th May which was also the date the first 4 young were seen.

Pairs brought out young at regular intervals throughout the summer and the survival rate was high thanks to the adults catching food very easily. Activity was most intense at the end of June with 16 pairs around the loch either feeding young, nest building or performing courtship. My peak count at the time was 12 pairs with 29 healthy young while 4 other pairs attempted to breed but the nests failed.

By early August the first broods were independent and dispersal was noted to Largo Bay with 21 adults and juveniles seen in the east end of the bay on 27th August.

18 adults and 23 juveniles were seen on the loch on 3rd September and from then on the birds dwindled with 5 adults and 12 juveniles left on September 30th. By 8th October all adults had left while by 21st October all the juveniles had gone.

Early indications for 1993 are very encouraging as large numbers of sticklebacks are in the loch and 13 pairs of Great Crested Grebes had returned by 10th April.

Alexander Ramage

Footnote:- The 1993 Breeding season.

After a promising start to the 1993 breeding season at Kilconquhar Loch, when 14 pairs of Great Crested Grebes were present on 26th March, it is sad to report that by 1st July only a single juvenile had been seen and even that bird perished after a few days.

Throughout May and June there were regular movements of birds between Kilconquhar Loch and the east end of Largo Bay with 17 pairs of birds involved. The main activity observed was simply pairs of birds sleeping in front of the reedbeds.

No doubt the shocking weather deterred the birds with high water levels, lack of reed growth and strong winds causing rough conditions which broke up the few nests built. There seemed to be plenty food available in the Loch so maybe if the weather ever settles down there may be late broods.

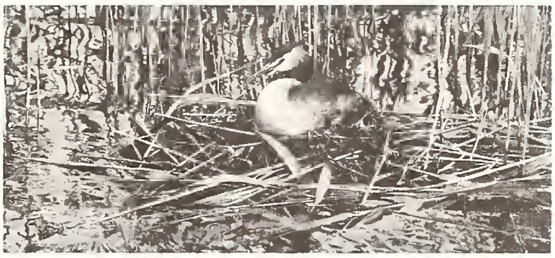
At the time of writing 1st July there were 9 pairs of Great Crested Grebes on Kilconquhar Loch with 7 pairs sleeping and 2 pairs with nests .

LIPU UK

Not all members may be aware of the work done by the Italian Bird Protection League (LIPU), an organisation which is really in the front line of bird protection. Our worries about egg-thieves, disturbance of rare breeding birds and poisoning of raptors almost pale into relative insignificance when compared with the massive annual slaughter in Italy, where any protection laws have to be enforced within in a society which is generally uncomprehending of the efforts of a few enthusiasts, and is thus apathetic if indeed not actively hostile. Things have however improved since the dark days of 1989,when at Messina alone over 400 birds were killed in a single day, or those of 1990 when the violence was extended to humans : LIPU volunteers were attacked and a forest guard shot. It was in the latter year that the British branch of LIPU made its first donation to the Italian mother organisation, since when some £37,000 has been sent, and in 1992 eight British volunteers joined the LIPU camp in Calabria. Last year, a record 35 poachers were arrested, little poaching was reported in Sicily, and the level of illegal shooting in Calabria was much reduced. If you would like to learn more, or to help either financially or in person, write to the LIPU UK representative, Roger Jordan, at 6 Butlers Close, Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 5BE (tel 0245 440567)

Chough numbers up

Many members who have visited Islay will retain the memory of the island's Chough population as one of the highlights of their trip. They will not be alone in welcoming the news that, nationally, the numbers of Britain's rarest crow have increased in the last decade. The 1992 census showed that there were now 1,247 pairs in Britain and Ireland compared with about 950 pairs in 1982, in addition to more than a thousand non-breeding birds. The largest concentration is in the Republic of Ireland, with 904 pairs, and Islay remains the best place to see them in Scotland, even though some lucky birders have, remarkably, found a vagrant in Fife. Islay now has 74 pairs out of a total Scottish breeding population of 88 pairs.



Great Crested Grebe *B S Turner*

Rights of Way and the Forestry Commission

Stan Shimeld from Crieff has written to us drawing our attention to the material in 'BTO News' about the privatisation of the Forestry Commission. He feels that all members of the SOC who value access to the countryside, whether for pure enjoyment or for census work, should be aware of the threat to rights of way over land to be sold by the Forestry Commission. The mechanics by which local planning committees have to be consulted exists, but Stan and others remain to be convinced that local councils are pursuing such cases with the vigour they deserve. Where there is a possibility that local rights of way over Forestry Commission land are in danger, concerned members should lose no opportunity to remind councils of their responsibilities to the community at large.

Caper capers on the Bonny Banks

Capercaillie and counters
Bernie Zonfrillo

It was inevitable that after two full days of spring sunshine the day of the second Loch Lomond Islands Capercaillie count would dawn grey and wet. Saturday 27th March was the chosen day but despite the cold and the damp, 45 "beaters" took the high road to Luss and assembled on the lochside in eager anticipation.

The count was intended to repeat the survey made in 1992 and again was a joint effort between SOC Clyde branch (organiser Chris Waltho), Scottish Natural Heritage South West Region and Glasgow University Zoology Departments's Rowardennan Field Station. Permission had been obtained in advance to survey the four chosen islands which represent the stronghold of this species in the Clyde Recording Area.

The sleepy village of Luss must have thought it had been invaded by a band of New-Age Travellers as the assembled multitude awaited transport out to the first island, Inchtavannach. Boats supplied by SNH and the University Field Station duly arrived and in a few minutes the long thin Barbour-green line of enthusiasts was lining up at one end of the island. Once watches had been synchronised and everyone was clear about what was required, walkie-talkies gave the all clear and the line took off, heading into the undergrowth. Prior to this, the boats had been moored at strategic points to count birds moving from one island to the next and those which took off out over water before doubling back. Exact times of sightings were noted along with direction of flight to avoid double counting. It wasn't long before the "line" wavered as some counters wandered across the territory of a rather irate male Caper. This bird showed no mercy and at least three counters bore beakmarks on clothing and wellies to prove it! Mid way across each island the line was halted to be re-aligned to keep progress uniform. My transects appeared to always include vertical rocks and the densest of Rhododendron growth but I was assured that the rest of the islands were much the same. Each of the other islands, Inchcruin, Inchmoan and Inchconnachan, was systematically covered in a similar fashion and by lunchtime everyone had seen Capercaillies at close quarters. Exotic diversities were also provided in the form of Red-necked Wallabies (14), Fallow Deer (5), Goats (4), Woodcock (5), Tawny Owl (1) and Great Spotted Woodpecker (1). Wallabies were thus the commonest mammals!

When the survey was complete and the roll call made, a grand total of 48 Capercaillies had been counted, comparing favourably with last year's count of 42. The preponderance of males - 33 - suggested that females were less inclined to fly up and be counted or were perhaps occupying areas of the mainland at this time of year. The exact number of breeding Capercaillies on the four islands is unknown, but at least some index of the populations has been established and will be a useful guide for future comparisons. Detailed studies of the island populations would prove very revealing. Previous surveys appear now to have been hopelessly inaccurate. Droppings from the Capercaillies showed them to be feeding mainly on Pine needles, which perhaps confirmed the comment from one counter that when the birds were cooked they tasted like turpentine! However the Loch Lomond island birds are not persecuted and their relatively high densities suggest that the four islands are of national importance for the species.

After the final island had been counted another "grouse" was produced from a hip-flask and the success of a good day out was toasted. A sort of Caper - ceilidh. Most people were keen to enrol for nest year's caper, which Chris assured us was very much on the cards.

I am sure all who attended, including the employees of SNH, RSPB, SWT and Glasgow University enjoyed their thrash through the undergrowth. We are grateful to Dorothy Simpson of SNH South-West and Glasgow University Field Station for providing boats and arranging things. Particular thanks are due to Chris Waltho and the other organisers for keeping everything under control, and making the day so enjoyable.

Bernie Zonfrillo

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
Telephone: Colonsay (09512) 316 – open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

REVIEWS

The Birds of Moray and Nairn *By Martin Cook; The Mercat Press 1992; 263pp; £9.95., ISBN 1-873644-05-1*

This book is to be recommended to anyone either living in or intending to visit Moray and Nairn. It contains a comprehensive species account, habitat guide, migrant arrival and departure dates and the best places to birdwatch within the county. It is illustrated with many black and white photos, vignettes and easily understood maps and figures.

Forest Merlins in Scotland. Their Requirements and Management, *by Jack Orchel. The Hawk and Owl Trust, Zoological Society of London 1992. 121pp £12.95. ISBN 09503187 4 4*

It is surprising that few books have been published on the subject of Merlins. Therefore this publication dealing with Forestry and conservation in relation to Merlins in Scotland is of particular interest.

The book covers the history of breeding Merlins in S W Scotland from the time when birds were recorded as breeding in typical moorland situations, through to the present day when much of the open moor has been given over to forestry. There are many tables, figures and maps to augment the text, some of which are somewhat repetitive, however. Many colour photographs, some of them excellent, along with several attractive vignettes by Donald Watson adorn the text.

Studies elsewhere are evaluated and recent population trends related to habitat changes are discussed.

The author summarises by forwarding ideas on management of the forest to meet the future needs of Merlins whilst stressing the need for the retention of open moorland foraging areas. These are important considerations and are put over in a well balanced fashion. There is no doubt that this book will be sought after by Merlin enthusiasts, but with the emphasis on conservation and management in a changing landscape it should attract the attention of a wider public.

Brian Cosnette.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java & Bali, *MacKinnon & Phillipps. OUP (1993) £25 pbk. ISBN 0-19-854034-5*

These days Scottish birdwatchers get just about anywhere in the world, witness Friday nights at the SOC Annual Conference. And why not Indonesia to which fares are currently less than two day returns ABZ-LHR? Until now one good reason might have been the lack of a handy-comprehensive-reliable field guide. After 1/8/93 no longer valid; this new publication embracing the Greater Sunda Islands is the answer to a dream. Following on recent checklists by BOU and IOS, its coverage extends to more that 800spp nearly all faithfully depicted in full colour. Since many will be new to those brought up in the Western Palearctic (with not a few species restricted to Sundas), this should prove a boon to accurate identification. No more iffy extrapolations from mainland SE Asia (King+) or N Borneo (Smythies), but all the straight poop between two covers - pbk/hbk to suit taste/purse.

There are of course the usual few pages of preamble on this and that. A bit of biogeography, the vogue chapter on 'conservation' to titillate those who need to sense an impending disaster to enjoy their birds, and (probably uniquely) 'Hints on Birdwatching in Forest'. Be warned this advice is not for the squeamish - leeches are literally a bloody nuisance. Nor would I endorse sitting on any old log (arson in Nethersole-Thompson's hallowed parlance). It is true however that soundings are commoner than sightings in tropical rain forest, and in that context the innovative sonosketches at Appendix 6 could prove helpful. In fact it might be your best chance of locating an Argus Pheasant or a Red Jungle Fowl.

In short a definite must for the wandering tattler, and an excellent excuse for me to go back better equipped - albeit to a log less ant-infested!

Stan Howe

Endowment Fund Grants

6 grant applications totalling £880, all for one year only, were considered by SOC Council at its meeting on 30th March 1993. The projects supported were:-

1. Ringing of Ducks in the Tayside area. £330 was awarded to the Tay Ringing Group for the construction of two duck traps.
2. Tawny Owls in the Castle Douglas/ Clatteringshaws area. £100 was awarded to Keith Kirk and Jim Barclay for the purchase of ladder to inspect nests.
3. Monitoring of breeding birds at Kilconquhar Loch, Fife, £300 was awarded to Mike Ramage to meet travel costs.
4. Upper Glen Esk Ring Ouzel survey. £150 awarded to David Arthur for travel and administration costs.
5. Monitoring of Tern colonies in the Moray Firth.
6. Studies of Swallows and Sand Martins in Easter Ross. Grants of £50 each awarded to Andrew Ramsay and David Butterfield to support travel costs.

In addition the continuation of 3-year grants from 1991 and 1992 meant that a further £680 was awarded . The total grant award for 1993 was £1560.

The new applications received in 1993 illustrate the variety of topics which can form the basis of detailed study by mainly amateur fieldworkers. Individuals, groups and SOC Branches therefore are urged to make use of the Endowment Fund - there must be a number of potential projects waiting for a small financial input to get them started or to realise their full potential.

Anyone interested in applying to the Fund should contact the SOC at 21 Regent Terrace to obtain a leaflet and application form. The closing date for applications to be considered by Council in March 1994 is **31st October 1993.**

Allan W Brown
Chairman, Surveys & Research Committee.

SOC Notices

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past two years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100 birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.

Indications are that young birds move considerable distances and I would therefore be grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. Any correspondence will be acknowledged. **Andrew Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen. AB1 1YP.**

Red Kites

As part of the JNCC/RSPB re-introduction programme with the RSPB North Scotland Office handling the Scottish side of things, would members please report any sightings of Red Kites to **RSPB North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible. Please do not think somebody else may have already reported your sighting: it is better to have more than one report of the same bird than none at all.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB Highland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW. Tel 0463 71500** as soon as possible.

SOC Annual Raffle

The Fife Branch has taken over the organisation of the annual raffle, and we hope that you will be able to sell all your tickets and even come back for more. Further tickets can be requested from **21 Regent Terrace**.

As you will see from the tickets enclosed with this mailing, the prizes are most attractive. First prize is a weekend break for two in St Andrews. Date to be arranged. Included with that is the offer to make it a bird-watching weekend, with local guides laid on if desired. Second prize is £100. There is still room for donations of further prizes, both by branches and individuals. Please contact **Anne-Marie Smout, Chesterhill, Shore Road, Anstruther, Fife KY10, Telephone 0333 310 330.**

Colour Ringed Ring Ouzels

This is the first year of a colour ringing study of Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus. I hope to continue this study for several years. This migratory thrush travels considerable distances in spring and autumn and any sightings of colour ringed birds, however incomplete, would be extremely useful.

The right leg carries a single colour ring donating year of ringing above or below the metal ring and a double combination on the left leg.

Any correspondence will be acknowledged. **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD Telephone 0241 53356**

Request for information: Birds of the Serengeti

The birds of the Serengeti National Park Tanzania, B.O.U. Checklist No 5 by Dieter Schmidl will soon be out of print and the author will therefore revise the data for a new printing. Please send **Serengeti Records** to ***Dieter Schmidl, Max-Planck-Institut, D-82319 Seewiesen, Post Starnberg, FRG.*** Any records would be gratefully received and acknowledged.

New Member for the BOU Records Committee

BOU Council have appointed Ken Shaw to the BOU Records Committee. Ken is well known, especially in Scotland, where he has been a member of the Scottish Records Committee since 1989, and local recorder for North-east Scotland since 1988. He works for the RSPB as Regional Officer for East Scotland, having previously been based in the Lakes, Edinburgh and Newcastle. He has travelled widely in, amongst other places, eastern and western Europe, the near East and China. He has just returned from a trip to the Yeman. He is a regular at Fair Isle and the Isles of Scilly. Ken replaces John Mather who retired by rotation, having served on the Committee for 8 years, including a period as Chairman.

"British Birds"

Many members no doubt already subscribe to "British Birds", the doyen of bird magazines. It is worth reminding others, however, that SOC members are entitled to a reduced subscription of 25% below the normal price.

Birdwatcher's Yearbook

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook has over the years become an indispensable part of the birdwatcher's library, and has been described with justice as the ornithologist's "Wisden". 1994's is no exception.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 1994 fall due on 1st October 1993, and for those members who wish to pay by cheque a renewal notice is enclosed with this issue. Some members are unfortunately guilty of not having updated their Bankers Orders to the new rate last year and a renewal notice is also enclosed for them to complete at the new rate. If you do not already pay by Bankers Order, perhaps you would consider doing so now, and help to reduce administration costs.

Sylvia Laing

Annual Report, Winter Syllabus 1993/94, Conference Booking Form, and Renewal Form.

All these should be enclosed with this issue of SBN, if not please contact 21 Regent Terrace.

SOC Photo Competition.

Entries for this year's photo competition should be sent in the first instance to 21 Regent Terrace by **22nd October 1993 at the latest.** Acknowledgements will be sent to all entrants and photos returned in early November.

Desk Top Publishing

This is the first issue of Scottish Bird News to be published on our new Desk-top publishing system. I hope you like the new look. This is completely new system to me, and I have encountered a few problems to say the least, however, help was at hand, and I cannot thank Ray Murray and Keith Chapman enough for there help. My thanks in particular goes to Keith, who gave up much valuable time to come into the office and set the system up, and try to teach me the ropes. Without his patient help and expertise this issue would possible not exist. Thank you again.

Evening Opening of Waterston Library

The Library will be open to SOC members on 27th September, 18th October, 15th November and 13th December 1993 from 18.00 to 21.00 hours. Further dates for 1994 will be published in the December issue of Scottish Bird News.

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1993 were:-

April: 1st £30 - R B Tozer, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 - B Pirie, Aberdeen; 3rd £10 - J H Ballantyne, Edinburgh.

May: 1st £50 - P J Sellar, Surrey; 2nd £30 - D Maciver, Stornoway; 3rd £20 - Miss D C Matchett, Edinburgh; 4th £10 - Mrs C B Cook, Kirkcudbright.

June: 1st £30 - Miss M C Lawrie, Troon; 2nd £20 - I L Hopkins, Isle of Bute; 3rd £10 - S F Jackson, Falmouth.

It is never too late to join the 200 Club. If you forgot to join in June, the start of its 'year', join now. Please just send me a cheque (payable to 'SOC 200 Club') for £9 - or £18 if you would like to take out a double subscription - and your membership will last until 31st May 1994. You will be entered into the monthly draw for prizes which, in a full year, amount to over £1000. Please send your cheque to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (089 682 2176)**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe.

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to the following people for so kindly giving up their time to come in to the office and pack the June issue of SBN and SB. Without their help this would be an enormous task. They are:- Bernard Brown, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, & Bob & Betty Smith.

Recorder's Change of Address

Ian Andrews the SOC recorder for Lothian has moved from 15 The Parsonage, Musselburgh to **39 Claykn owes Drive, Musselburgh, Midlothian EH21 6UW.** Please send all records for Lothian to him at his new address.

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1993 No. 32
ISSN0268-3199

Edited by Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy

Caledonian Pinewoods

The importance of the Caledonian Pinewoods which support a specialised range of bird species including several species listed in the Red Data Birds in Britain such as Crested Tit, Scottish Crossbill, Capercaillie and Osprey, and smaller numbers of Wryneck, Golden Eagle, Merlin, Black Grouse and Goldeneye cannot be stressed enough, hence the RSPB's launch to save the native Pinewoods in Scotland. At present the ancient Pinewoods cover less than 1% of their former range, and unless urgent action is taken these scattered remnants will be lost forever. The RSPB's Abernethy Reserve covers 13% of the total area left and holds 10% of the Crested Tit population as well as 4% of the British population of Capercaillie and 2% of the world population of Scottish Crossbill.

The Pinewoods also provide habitats for unique plants including Twinflower, Creeping Lady's Tresses and Lesser Twayblade and several species of wintergreens and orchids. Many of Britain's rarest species of beetles, moths, butterflies and dragonflies are found in the Caledonian Forests. Some are confined to single Pinewood stands or forest areas, and four fly species new to Britain have recently been found in the Abernethy Forest Reserve. Most of the 44 species of beetle in Britain that are restricted to Caledonian Pinewoods depend on old dying trees and dead wood.

A recently discovered Water Beetle which is new to Britain and lives in water-filled holes around old stumps, as well as endangered species of Hoverfly, are known to exist only in the Abernethy Forest. Wild Cat and Pine Marten are also important members of the Ancient Pinewood inheritance.

The EC Directive on Conservation of Wild Birds requires member countries to notify sites as Special Protection Areas (SPA) for rare or migratory species of bird. To date only six Pinewood sites covering 58% of the Pinewood area have been identified as meeting these criteria and only Abernethy Forest has been classified as an SPA.

Following the retreat of the last ice age, a succession of vegetation types spread north. Tundra was replaced by birch woodland before the Scots Pine arrived some 8,000 years ago. The natural Caledonian Pinewoods were an open mosaic of pines and other species with trees of all ages, including many dead and dying trees, shrubs and glades. The understorey was similarly varied, with few plants surviving in the thickets of young trees. However as the trees grew, and more light penetrated, mosses, grasses, heather and blaeberry carpeted the forest floor. With progressive ageing and degeneration of the trees and natural storms, gaps opened up in the canopy allowing dense vegetation and pine seedlings to flourish. However, man started to have an impact of the Pinewoods about 4,000 years ago, through burning, felling and grazing. The Highland Clearances also brought sheep into many areas thus preventing regeneration in unenclosed Pinewoods. More recently, rising Red Deer numbers have also halted the regeneration of such woods.

Pinewood showing luxuriant undergrowth. Martin Cook

Many more of these woods will disappear over the next 50-100 years unless urgent action is taken to reduce grazing pressures by Red Deer and Sheep and bring about a reduction in numbers. The current estimate of Red Deer numbers is about 300,000, and in Highland and Grampian regions alone there is an estimated total of some two million sheep. Many of the Pinewoods are surrounded by plantations of non-native trees, which effectively prevent expansion and can invade existing Pinewoods, thus halting any natural regeneration. Many Pinewoods were underplanted with fast growing crops of non-native trees, while some were ploughed, drained, or burned off prior to planting. This prevented further regeneration of the typical Pinewood vegetation together with the wildlife dependent on it. However, in 1988 the Forestry Commission introduced improved grants for native Pinewood under the Woodland Grant Scheme to encourage the expansion of privately owned native Pinewoods. Between 1990 and 1992 an encouraging number of grants had been taken up and almost 3,000 hectares planted or regenerated. One of the problems with this grant is that it does not provide adequate encouragement to owners and managers to manage their Pinewoods for conservation. It unfortunately encourages fencing, rather than deer population control and the removal of sheep, as the preferred means of tackling the problem of grazing, and of course these fences are responsible for the death of many birds, particularly Capercaillie and Black Grouse, birds which we are trying to help. Work recently carried out by RSPB and SNH showed that a reduction in deer numbers does enable the Pinewoods to regenerate without the need for fencing. This of course will only work when all estates are co-operating in reducing the numbers of deer and sheep on the land. The terms of the grant also encourage planting of even-aged trees and a minimum stocking rate of 1,100 trees per hectare. This unfortunately encourages planting of trees on ground which would be better left open, and results in plantation style forests. It also encourages unnecessary management such as ploughing, scarifying and fertilising in order to ensure rapid establishment of the planted trees, rather than the minimal intervention which would be the best option for conservation.

The RSPB foresees a future in which native Pinewoods cover far larger areas of the Highlands, with some areas of high conservation value being kept as zones of minimal intervention. The rest of the Pinewoods would be managed for multiple benefits: some mature trees would be harvested while others would be left as seed producing trees and for their conservation value. Forest owners could earn income from diverse uses such as deer stalking, game shooting and tourists who wish to enjoy the peaceful scenery and wildlife. Three main areas have so far been identified as primary areas for conservation of these Pinewoods due to their important populations of birds, mammals, plants and insects, and the fact that they already contain most of the larger Pinewoods. These are the Beauly catchment, Strathspey and Deeside. However, Pinewoods outwith these areas should also be protected, regenerated and allowed to expand. Areas of open ground would remain within the Pinewood zones, for farming, conservation and the management of deer. Expansion from existing Pinewoods is preferable to the establishment of new native Pinewood, since the flora and fauna associated with the ancient woodlands can spread and regenerate along with the woodland.

In November 1992 Forest Enterprise unveiled an ambitious strategy for the rehabilitation of native Pinewoods. They aim to set up 15 Caledonian Forest Reserves, bring existing Pinewoods back to a natural and viable state, and to double their total areas to 6,000 hectares by the end of the century. This welcome action means the FE could provide a lead for other Pinewood owners in the rehabilitation and management of our native Pinewoods. Further research however is needed to establish the appropriate techniques for the rehabilitation of damaged Pinewoods, and on integrated management for timber and conservation. The Pinewood Managers Group provides some of the necessary experience and information, although much more work needs to be done.

It is disappointing to note that some of our native Pinewoods with high conservation values have still not been notified as SSSI's, and are totally unprotected against unsuitable development. In several Pinewood SSSI's the boundary has been so tightly drawn as to exclude dispersed Pine Trees or even to exclude part of the Pinewood because it is under different ownership. This undoubtedly leads to inadequate protection and management as a whole, and since Scots Pine do not regenerate well under the shade of the tree canopy, a regeneration zone of adjacent moorland needs to be included within the boundaries of each Pinewood. Native Pinewoods are of international importance and so require international recognition, protection and assistance, and the EC Birds Directive and EC Habitats Directive provide these. In addition powers to control felling, planting and subsequent management of forests are administered by the Forestry Authority who maintain a Pinewoods Register. To qualify for inclusion, Pinewoods must have proof of ancient origin, and due to this strict criterion, many fine Pinewoods are excluded from the Register.

So let us hope that our ancient Caledonian Pinewoods that we all love so much can and will be saved for future generations of Birds, Mammals, Plants, Insects and of course people.

Loch Morlich

Moorfoots "May"hem

The 1993 breeding season "round up" in SBN 31 prompts me to record the following observations from the Moorfoot Hills.

On 21st April I noted a Lapwing incubating a clutch of four eggs on rough grass near the Heriot Water. On the 8th May three of the eggs had hatched, with the fourth "chipping"; the three downy young were ringed in the nest. On 12th May two of the brood and the female were noted on the other side of the burn (12 m wide at this point). The following two days saw the heaviest May snowfalls in recent memory, with the 14th also being the coldest May day on record (local shepherds found around 1m of snow lying in cleuchs and dyke-backs). Due to snow - blocked roads (!) I was unable to visit the Lapwing site until 16th May, when I was amazed to see one chick still alive - I was even more surprised to find the female sitting on the entire brood of four in the early morning of the 19th. Given the atrocious weather conditions, with lying snow having covered feeding areas, it seems likely that the chicks had been brooded almost constantly over the 13th - 14th, thus ensuring their survival. At least one chick was still around on 5th June, close to fledging.

Meanwhile, only 3.25km away, but at 400m a.s.l. (100m higher than the Heriot Water site), no Lapwings at all nested during 1993, the first blank year since my visits began in 1985.

Nearer Innerleithen some Dippers did not fare much better, with a brood ready to fledge being washed out of their nest as the Leithen Water rose about 1.5m above normal (even for winter floods) when almost all the snow of the 13th and 14th melted rapidly. The adults survived but did not re-nest during the remainder of the season.

However, Sand Martin numbers at a small colony near Leadburn, studied by Stuart Craig and myself, had results similar to 1992's, with almost the same proportion of juveniles (43.2% in 1993, 43.7% in 1992) in the total catch of individual birds. The season was rather protracted, there still being young in three nest chambers as late as the 28th August, with one chamber still occupied on 4th September.

At the same site, Meadow Pipits have been tape-lured and ringed by Stuart and myself since the autumn of 1990. A study of their post-juvenile moult (hardly any adults have been caught) showed that for July and August 1990 - 92, 28.0% of the birds (n = 175) were in the later stages of, or had completed, their moult. For the same period in 1993, the proportion was 7.7% (n = 181).
This suggests that, since fewer birds were at the same advanced stages of moult, most had hatched and fledged much later than in previous seasons.

Tom Dougall.

Some unfortunate Dippers were not able to raise a healthy brood like this one.
William S Paton

Charles Frank

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Tawny Owls in Galloway

Since the winter of 1990 Jim Barclay and myself who are both members of the North Solway Ringing Group have been working on a small Tawny Owl study catching adults and ringing all nestlings. The main study area covers the 10sq kms south of Castle Douglas but we also monitor a small number of boxes and barrels in an upland site near New Galloway which were erected by Forest Enterprise ranges. The main study area is on lowland farmland which has small broad leaved woodland areas with blocks of conifer plantations mixed between them, some forestry Commission, some privately owned. This patchwork of woodland should allow us to monitor the chick dispersal fairly easily and to see if the chicks born in conifer plantations prefer to stay in them or move away to find new sites.

Nest sites

When you start to look for natural sites you soon find that likely looking holes are usually full of water or simply not big enough. In the conifer plantations holes are almost non-existent and a few birds have nested on the ground. With this in mind we have erected probably the biggest selection of boxes and barrels you could find. The wooden boxes vary from old ammunition boxes to tea chests as well as the standard BTO chimney box design which even with the most careful siting often gets wet inside because of the open top, and large broods are very cramped. Plastic barrels on the other hand are very easy to obtain, they are light, almost maintenance free and can now be found in environmentally friendly colours although the birds don't seem to mind the colour. We are using various sizes from 15 litres to 51 litres with the birds preferring the larger size. We always records prey at the nest and on one occasion found an almost fully grown cock pheasant in a 15 litre barrel with 4 chicks, and not a lot of room. 1993 brought quite a surprise when we found 4 Red Squirrels occupying wooden boxes, one of which had held a Tawny the previous year. We have also been taking Blackfly samples from a number of sites and sending them to Steve Petty who is doing research into this fly through his own Tawny Owl study. During 1992 we found Blackfly at a number of sites, in the nest, on chicks and on adults. In 1993 no Blackfly were recorded at any sites, even adult females caught the previous year with Blackfly were now clear.

An example of one of the successful
barrel nestboxes
Keith Kirk

Movement

So far there has been very little movement of birds within the study area, except for a two year old female which bred successfully in 1992 in a plastic barrel and moved to an identical nest site 3km away in the next valley where she successfully reared 2 chicks in 1993. The original site was unoccupied during 1993 so perhaps she lost her mate. The surrounding habitat is similar at both sites.

A successful outcome! Keith Kirk

Summary

The staff at the Forestry Commission Office in Castle Douglas have been very helpful in allowing us to erect and monitor nestboxes on their land as well as individual private landowners. We are also very grateful to the Scottish Ornithologists' Club for a grant towards our project from the club's endowment fund during 1993. We are also grateful to ICI Plastics Division at Dumfries for donating the plastic banding we use to fix boxes and barrels to trees which eliminates the need for nails. This tape along with specially designed plastic or metal clips will secure any size of box to almost any object.

Tawny Owl looking for directions
Keith Kirk

Tawny Owls 1993

	Site	Type	Laying Date	Clutch Size	Brood Size
Threave Gardens	1	Box	March 27	2.00	1.00
Threave Gardens	2	Hole	March 12	3.00	0.00
Threave Gardens	3	Box	April 1	1.00	1.00
Craigton Wood	7	Hole	March 20	4.00	3.00
Potterland	14	Box	March 23	3.00	2.00
Screel Forest	15	Box	March 4	3.00	0.00
Doach Forest	16	Box	March 19	2.00	1.00
Barwhillanty	20	Hole	March 19	3.00	2.00
Grobdale	21	Hole	not known	1.00	0.00
Craigshinnie	25	Barrel	end March	2.00	2.00
Meikle Wood	44	Box	March 7	2.00	2.00
Craigton Bog	45	Barrel	March 1	3.00	3.00
Jackdaw Quarry	46	Hole	April 1	2.00	1.00
Complex	50	Barrel	not known	2.00	2.00
Bennie/Museum	51	Barrel	April 1	3.00	2.00
Clonyard Loch	57	Box	April 2	2.00	0.00
White Loch	58	Box	March 21	2.00	1.00
Craigenbay	59	Barrel	not known	3.00	1.00
Brough Wood	60	Box	March 26	2.00	0.00
			Totals	45.00	24.00
			Average	2.37	1.26

Keith Kirk & Jim Barclay

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Conservation in Practice

On all sides we are besieged by pleas to preserve, and possibly improve, our environment. Most of us feel that there is little we can do at the personal level beyond using unleaded petrol and environment friendly detergents. As regards our particular interest in encouraging bird-life, we probably feed our garden birds in winter but do little else. For some of us however, more is possible, and a supreme example of this is to be found up in Caithness, at the home of the Chairman of the local branch, Julian Smith.

In 1988 Julian moved in to a property just about as far north as you can get on the mainland, a couple of miles from Dunnet Head. Not content with renovating his house and making it into both a comfortable home for his family and an efficient work-base, he resolved to make the adjoining rough pasture into an attractive oasis for birds. This involved a gargantuan task, but any visitor can immediately see how well it has succeeded. The main piece of civil engineering was the excavation of a scrape. This was carried out in three stages, and results in an area of 3 acres, fed by a burn which flows into the nearby loch and dotted with small islands and gravel bars. It was probably a unique undertaking in the area; while every other landowner was busy draining marshland, Julian was concerned to flood his piece of land. But it had its desired effect, and the flood of water was soon followed by a veritable flood of birds. Julian has a "garden list" - interpreted as birds seen from his living-room window - which most of us could only dream about ; at the time of writing it includes no fewer than 152 species. With many regular migrants and breeding species still to feature, there is a realistic potential of over 180 - and who knows? if the first 5 years are an indication, maybe even 200. Obviously it is the passage birds which give rise to the greatest interest, but these are not limited to the large numbers of wader which one might reasonably expect in a pool-side environment, even though these include Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and most recently juvenile Pacific Golden Plover. Birds from almost every conceivable habitat have called in, from Quail to Hawfinch, from Iceland Gull to Red-rumped Swallow, from Long-tailed Ducks to White-winged Black Terns. Apart from these passing migrants, the new habitat has also attracted potential and actual breeders in the shape of Curlew, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Common Gull, Teal and Arctic Tern. No doubt it was the presence of the last named which give the writer a novel experience : watching Arctic Skuas while sitting indoors in a comfortable armchair.

Wader scrape at Brough. J A Smith

Pintail on the scrape. C J Jones

This might give the impression that the work was mere self-indulgence by a committed birder. There is, however, more to it than that, although Julian would be the first to admit the enormous pleasure he has derived from his investment of labour and money. He also feels that the well-being of the Caithness environment depends largely on the good will of the local population, not just now but in generations to come. So the pool at St John's is also a small scale effort to provide an environmental educational facility. This is a facility unfortunately almost totally absent in Caithness, apart from the tremendous work done by the local Ranger Service and dedicated individuals. In recognition of its social value, NCC/SNH helped with very welcome grants. The RSPB-pattern hide which overlooks the scrape is readily available to visitors, particularly to parties of local school children who are possibly experiencing for the first time the wealth of their local natural history. This programme is still in its infancy but there are definite plans to offer more, both in terms of information available and opportunities to visit. Visitors are not just local; one Central European birder spent a solid three days there this summer, and, having arrived at the end of a Europe-wide eco-tour depressed at conditions throughout our continent, went away euphoric about the possibilities for the future. One can see why .... and perhaps it should inspire us to do a bit more ourselves.

The new Breeding Bird Survey

Becoming involved in census work has never been simpler : this new scheme, to be launched in spring 1994, involves one reconnaissance visit to a pre-selected one-kilometre survey square and just two morning visits to count birds! The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) uses simple and efficient fieldwork methods to keep track of bird populations not only in the United Kingdom as a whole but also at the level of each individual country, Scotland, N Ireland, Wales and England. The BBS, which is organised by the BTO and financially supported by the BTO itself, by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, is set to be the most advanced and extensive scheme of its kind in Europe.

The need for precise information on populations of common and not so common birds has perhaps never been so great given the progressive changes occurring in the environment and increasing demands placed upon the countryside from farming, industry and recreation alike. Monitoring breeding birds is a fundamental requirement for effective bird conservation. New methods will improve greatly our ability to monitor 'terrestrial' breeding birds throughout the UK, especially in Scotland where coverage has been limited in the past by shortage of volunteers. Indeed, the need for improved regional information was a key requirement in the development of the BBS and its introduction follows a careful programme of work examining alternative approaches to bird monitoring, which culminated in the Pilot Census Project (1992-1993). The latter was an ambitious and demanding trial which tested different survey methods and assessed the response of observers. The results of this study have guided the development of the BBS, through the BBS itself will be much simpler than the PCP since it will use just one method.

The BTO Common Birds Census (CBC) and Waterways Bird Survey (WBS) are probably the best known monitoring schemes in the UK, which, since 1962 and 1974 respectively, have been THE schemes by which annual changes in the population levels of a range of 'common' birds have been monitored during the breeding season. Both schemes use the well established territory mapping method. CBC and WBS have stimulated a great deal of bird research which has increased our understanding of bird populations and they have become the standard against which similar schemes are measured both here and abroad. As an example of the important results that have emerged, recent studies have shown drastic declines in farmland birds over the last fifteen years. These include a decline of greater that 50% over the period 1968-91 for Tree Sparrow, Grey Partridge, Corn Bunting, Spotted Flycatcher, Reed Bunting, Song Thrush, Skylark and Linnet. The long-term trends for all species were catalogued in the book *Population Trends in British Breeding Birds* (Marchant J H, Hudson R, Carter S P & Whittington P A, 1990, BTO).

Despite the considerable achievements of CBC and WBS, we are keen to improve and extend our monitoring work and we recognise that the present schemes may be seen as limited in the following ways: plots are chosen by observers and may not be representative of the countryside; habitat coverage is largely confined to farmland and woodland and to linear waterways; plots are concentrated in the south and east of Britain; and both fieldwork and analysis are labour intensive. Fieldwork usually involves around 30 hours per year added to which are up to 25 hours of indoor mapwork and territory analysis by BTO staff. For most birdwatchers this level of commitment is an impossible barrier to getting involved in census work and this, together with the considerable demands on staff input, limits our ability to expand the present schemes. Questions of 'randomness' and 'representativeness' may seem esoteric but are, in fact, central to producing hard facts about bird populations which can then be used to further bird conservation. Slogging over moorland and counting in cities may not seem glamorous to some but both are essential components of comprehensive and effective monitoring and, ultimately therefore, to conservation.

The Breeding Bird Survey is specifically designed to overcome the problems of CBC and WBS. The survey plot is a one-kilometre square of the National Grid, chosen randomly by computer. This guarantees a representative picture of bird populations. Fieldwork involves just three visits to a chosen square as described above. Mass participation will be crucial to the scheme's success and we aim to have 2000-3000 squares covered on an annual basis throughout the UK. In this way, the new scheme will cover more regions and habitats and, as a consequence, more breeding species than any previous schemes. By working together, the monitoring efforts of both statutory and voluntary conservation bodies can be usefully combined to make highly efficient use of resources and manpower and to set new standards in bird monitoring work in the UK.

In a Scottish context, the new scheme has much to offer and we very much hope that we can work with the SOC in promoting the new Breeding Bird Survey and making

Reed Bunting

effective use of our data. We read with interest a recent letter in *Scottish Bird News* by Allan W Brown regarding survey work in Scotland and hope that this article demonstrates that we are both concerned about this issue and committed to improving the situation. Upland birds and Scottish specialities are top of the list of birds for which we would like to improve coverage; these include Buzzard, Black Grouse, Common Sandpiper, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Red Grouse, Raven, Wheatear, Stonechat, Whinchat, Redstart, Siskin and Twite.

If you have relatively good skills in bird identification and have three mornings available in spring and early summer, PLEASE get involved in BBS and take on a square. If you have more time then please do more squares! Each region has its own scheme organiser who, in liaison with BTO HQ, is responsible for allocating squares to volunteers, for providing back-up, and for co-ordinating the return of data. In most cases the local organiser is also the BTO's Regional Representative (BTO HQ can supply a full national list).

If you would like more information, please contact either your local **BTO Regional Representative or Steve Carter at BTO HQ.**

Richard D Gregory and Steve Carter Census Unit, BTO.

Blackbird J F Young

Car nesting Blackbird

There have been many instances of Blackbirds building nests in tractors and other vehicles but a remarkable example came to my notice recently. On May 9th a Blackbird built a nest on the thermostat of a rear-engined Skoda in the village of Breasclete in Lewis. As the car was in daily use the nest was removed as a fire risk. During the next nine days nine nests were built and removed. The owner was in a quandary. She was advised to remove the ninth nest to a more suitable place in the boot or, if that didn't work, buy a new car.

The following day an egg was found in the tenth nest, balanced precariously once again on the thermostat, and when the car was started for a journey into Stornoway the Blackbird flew out but returned when the car came back and laid another egg. It was not until the twentieth nest had been built and removed on June 8th that the unfortunate bird got the message and abandoned further efforts to raise a family in a Skoda.

Peter Cunningham

Buzzard egg in Blackbird nest

Blackbirds annually nest in the climbing roses and honeysuckle that surround the front door of my house near Roy Bridge, Inverness-shire. Recently, while clearing some of this growth I was surprised to see what appeared to be a white egg filling the cup of one of the Blackbird nests. However, as the nest was positioned just 15cm under the house eaves a clear view was unobtainable. I decided that since the nest was not longer usable I would remove if for further inspection. To my amazement there, embedded amongst the material of the nest, was indeed an egg, white with numerous brown to russet blotches, and my experience of Buzzard eggs indicated that this was in fact an egg of that species.

Buzzard B S Turner

No reference is made in Cramp, S & Simmons, R.E.L. (eds) 1980. The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Oxford., Newton, I. 1979. Population Ecology of Raptors. Poyser, London. or Brown, L. 1976 British Birds of Prey, Collins, Glasgow. to Buzzards utilising other bird's nests in this way and that a Buzzard would, or could, have laid in such a location seems somewhat improbable. More likely, but nonetheless still remarkable, is that the egg was placed by some other creature. My suspicions lay with the Pine Martens, and Dr David Balharry has confirmed (pers comm) that Pine Martens are known to cache food items. With the nearest Buzzard nest some 0.5 of a kilometre away across an open hillside and the egg still intact when deposited in the nest, its contents having since leaked out, the mystery may never be solved.

Dominic Sargent.

Has any other reader found similar but puzzling eggs in strange nests? If so we would like to hear about them. Eds.

Sea Eagle Success

Despite adverse weather conditions over much of Scotland in Spring particularly during May, 8 pairs of Sea Eagles attempted to breed. Four pairs successfully fledged five young despite one pair losing its nest during a storm, when the nesting tree broke off from its precarious cliff perch plunging the chick 80 feet to the ground below. However, help was at hand, and the uninjured chick was successfully placed into a hastily constructed artificial eyrie, and went on to fledge none the worse for his unfortunate experience, thus bringing the total of Scottish fledged birds to 34 since the first re-introduction in 1975.

The re-introduction project, jointly undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage (formerly NCC) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds began 1975 and over the next 10 years released 82 young birds on the Island of Rum, these birds having been brought in from the healthy population in Norway.

Scotland now has 10 territorial pairs although only 8 attempted to breed in 1993, While the SNH and RSPB are delighted with this success it was decided to supplement the slow re-establishment of the Scottish population by bringing in a further 10 young birds from Norway this year. These have now been released at a secret location.

All the Sea Eagle chicks have been fitted with individually marked red wing tags to enable identification. Any reports of Sea Eagle sightings, however incomplete, should be sent to **Colin Crooke, RSPB, North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000.**

SBR with boobs!

The recording areas mentioned in the reference section at the back of the 1991 Scottish Bird Report disagreed with the map printed on the inside back page. This came about from using an old map where Fair Isles and the Isle of May were treated as belonging to the neighbouring recording areas, Shetland and Fife respectively. This upset the numbering somewhat. I'm sure that the correct numbering will have been obvious to most of our readership and will ensure the next report will have the areas correctly numbered.

Ray Murray

Threat to Martnaham Loch

Ayrshire members are concerned about a threat to Martnaham Loch, an important SSSI, which is host to a large variety of wintering wildfowl, scarce passage migrants and Ayrshire's only recent pair of breeding Great Crested Grebes. These birds, together with the local fish, flora and recently recolonising Otters, will be at risk if an application by Barr Ltd is approved. This involves using the nearby Sandhill Glen as a landfill site, with an associated lorry-cleaning facility and canteen. Since the burn running through the glen, which is itself rich in wildlife, drains directly into the loch, the possibility of avoiding pollution seems non-existent. Members who are familiar with this beautiful area are urged to write proposing rejection of the scheme, quoting "Landfill Site at Sandhill Farm", to the Planning Dept at Burns House, Burns Statue Square, Ayr.

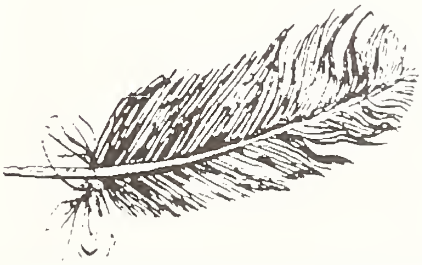
Scottish Birds Records Committee

Election of New Member

In 1990 S.B.R.C. commenced a rotation with one member now retiring each year. Dr Brian Marshall is due to stand down at the end of this year and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Kevin Osborn, who also lives in Shetland. He is a ringer, has been an Assistant Warden on Fair Isle and is a member of his local records committee.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 31st December, being signed by both a proposer and a seconder who must both be S.O.C. members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all S.O.C. Local recorders will be eligible to vote.

Ron Forester, Secretary, S.B.R.C. 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD



● NEW BOOK ● NEW BOOK ●

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Compiled by
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James B. Reid and
Robert A. Chapman

Published for the
British Trust for Ornithology,
the Scottish Ornithologists' Club
& the Irish Wildbird Conservancy

This new atlas of breeding birds is the significantly improved follow-up to the best selling previous volume published in 1976. Each species account includes three maps, one showing the current breeding distribution, one in full colour showing relative abundance of the species throughout its range and one highlighting changes in distribution between the current and original surveys. The text, tables and vignette complete each double-page spread. A detailed introduction outlines the methods used in the survey work and explains the various analyses of data gathered. Appendices give details of rare breeders and a wealth of extra tabular material. This new atlas is an indispensable reference for every ornithologist with an interest in the birds of Britain and Ireland.

October 1993, 576 pages
ISBN: 0 85661 075 5
Price: £40.00

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REVIEWS

Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa; The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Vol 7. Flycatchers to Shrikes. *Stanley Cramp & Chris Perrins eds. 1993. 577pp , 29 colour plates. Oxford University Press. £75. ISBN 0-19-857510-6*

This is the penultimate volume of BWP series; at 577 pages it is marginally the smallest volume so far. The families and species covered are Flycatchers, Babblers, Tits, Nuthatches, Wallcreeper, Treecreepers, Sunbirds, Golden Oriole and the Shrikes, although the plates showing the eggs for the Flycatchers and Babblers are to be found in the previous volume - a consequence of the decision to split the planned volume 5 into two more-manageable volumes.

I found the illustrations more uniform in style than in some of the previous volumes, even though four artists contributed. The Tit family, including the SOC's emblem, are of a particularly high standard, as they should be since they are generally much more observable than some of the more exotic species included in this volume.

As usual, it is impossible to judge the size of any unfamiliar species from the illustrations alone. This can be most confusing when two dissimilar species occur on the same plate; for example the Bearded Tit appears to be bigger than the Babblers, although the text reveals this to be far from the truth.

The first volume in this series was published in 1977 and the eighth and final volume is promised for 1995. The editorial board will be glad to have got the final volume off their hands in the last few weeks. They will have produced a worthy successor the the Handbook of British Birds (Witherby et al.) which, surely, no one will want to improve on for many decades to come.

Lance Vick.

Hamlyn Bird Behaviour Guides. Birds of Prey. *Nicholas Hammond illustrated by Bruce Pearson. 160pp. Hamlyn 1993. £14.99 ISBN 0-540-01277-7*

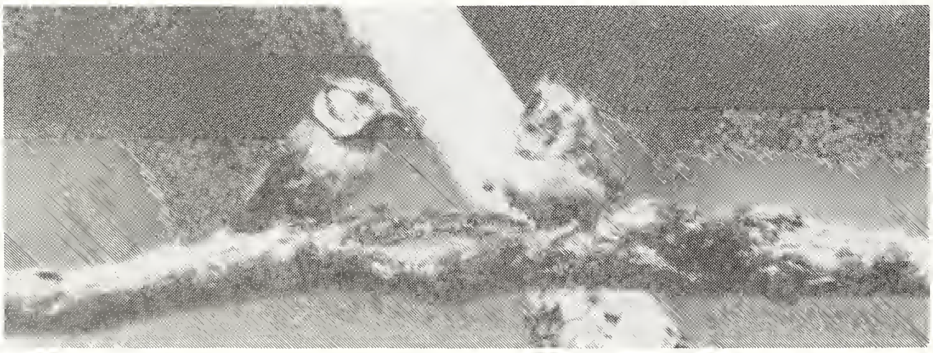
This is an extremely good little book giving an insight into the behaviour of 38 species of diurnal birds of prey that are regularly seen in the Western Palearctic. This is the first of a series of books to be published by Hamlyn giving authoritative accounts of feeding, breeding, territorial and social habits of the major bird families of Britain & Europe and superbly illustrated both in colour and black & white by Bruce Pearson.

Seabirds. *Rob Hume illustrated by Bruce Pearson 160pp. Hamlyn £14.99 ISBN 0-600-57951-4*

The second book in this series groups the seabird species of the Western Palearctic by the different aspects of their behaviour, making revealing comparisons and contrasts between them.
Introductory chapters on classification and distribution show how seabirds are related to each other and to other birds, how ocean currents, winds and climate dictate where they breed and winter and how form relates to feeding and flight. A comprehensive gazetteer details some of the best sea-bird watching sites in western Europe.

Mountain Reflections. *Keith Brockie. Mainstream Publishing 1993. 127pp. £17.50. ISBN 1-85158-557-5*

Another superb book from well known artist and SOC member Keith Brockie. Those members lucky enough to have been at the SOC Annual Conference had the chance of gaining added insight into the making of this book. In this book Keith paints his personal picture of a journey through the seasons at Glenshee and Svalbard watching and noting the seasonal rhythms of Mountain Hare and Ptarmigan This book contains an extremely high quality of work, one that one has come to expect from an artist of Keith's calibre. At £17.50 this book is excellent value for money.



Crested Tits Ernest Ruxton

Hamlyn Species Guides; The Kestrel *- Michael Shrubb 128pp . £9.99 ISBN 0-54-01278-5.* ***The Common Tern*** *- Rob Hume 127pp. £9.99 ISBN 0-540-01266-1 and* ***The Great Tit*** *-Andrew Gosler 128pp. £9.99 ISBN 0-600-57950-6*

Another new and excellent series by the well known publishers Hamlyn. These are the first three books in a new series looking at some of our well known and loved species. All three books are packed full of information and are illustrated with colour pictures, line drawings and simple graphs. These books would make an ideal Christmas present for somebody wishing to learn more about these species.

Eric Hosking's Classic Birds - 60 years of Bird Photography.
Harper Collins 1993. 190pp £16.99 ISBN 0-00-219975-0

This book contains over 190 of Eric's classic black and white pictures dated back to 1929. For those who knew and loved Eric's work this book is a must; it has been updated with the story behind each picture as to how it was taken, how the bird was found and other interesting anecdotes in connection with the pictures. The book has been updated by his son David Hosking and old friend Jim Flegg who have together written the text.

Collins Field Guide - Birds of Britain & Europe. *Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort & P.A.D. Hollom.*
1520 colour illustrations, 366 maps, 261pp
Harper Collins 1993. £14.99
ISBN 0-00-219900-9

The 5th edition of this excellent field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe has now been published with a feast of new and improved colour plates and informative descriptions of many bird species including rare and accidental birds to Britain and Europe. A must for every ornithologist.

Birding Brazil; a check-list and site guide *Bruce C Forrester published by author. 254pp, numerous maps. ISBN 0-9521567-0-9*

Much time and energy has been spent by Bruce, one of the pillars of the Ayr SOC establishment, in the research necessary for this book. It has not been time ill spent; one can only quote Davis Finch's preface, where he describes the guide as being "indispensable for anyone considering Brazil as a bird-watching destination". It might also well inspire others to visit this astonishing country with 1661 bird species.

Great Auk Islands: a field biologist in the Arctic. *by T Birkhead. T & A D Poyser. 275pp £22 ISBN 0 85661 0771*

Reviews are normally written by someone with a certain expertise in the area. The present reviewer lays no such claims, but as Tim Birkhead explicitly states that he has written the book not for his fellow-scientists, but for "those who enjoy natural history and wild places, and who want to know something of what motivates scientists", this is appropriate enough.

In this aim, the author unequivocally succeeds. He imparts both the desire for knowledge which has motivated him and the atmosphere of the remote areas, principally in the Canadian Arctic, where he has pursued this search. The non-scientist can only admire his dedication and also envy his experiences, be they adventures with Polar Bears or the tranquillity and emptiness of the Far North. The islands where the Great Auk nested are in fact not the only, or even the main theme of the book, but the rapacity of man which led to these islands becoming mere memorials to an extinct bird is amply documented. This is a very readable book, readily accessible to non-scientists, thanks to Tim Birkhead's style and his conscious avoidance of masses of statistics.

Read it for a taste of the Arctic, read it for an insight into the scientist's mind - even if occasionally this reinforces non-scientific prejudices about "mad scientists", such as the vivid mental image of an earnest zoologist spending "several breeding seasons rolling.....eggs around ledges" to ascertain the radius through which they rolled!.

Michael Murphy.

William MacGillivray *by Robert Ralph. HMSO London 1993., 94pp 32 colour plates; numerous b & w illustrations. Hardback £25.00 ISBN 0 11 310044 2*

In 1952 Professor Wynne-Edwards wrote "It might need no more than a lucky spark to kindle the popular interest in William MacGillivray". This book may well be the strike of that lucky spark.

It is no exaggeration to say that William MacGillivray, Botanist, Geologist, Anatomist, Zoologist and pre-eminently Ornithologist was the greatest of all Scottish naturalists, yet how little is known of him. It is a curious circumstance that many great Scottish naturalists have become almost forgotten: a full translation of Sibbald's *Scotia Illustrata* has never been published, nor has Sir High Gladstone's Life of Sir William Jardine.

In his only earlier biography (1901, re-written in 1910) he was described as "Ornithologist". His "History of British Birds" was described by Mullens and Kirke Swann as "One of the most original histories of British birds we possess", but it never achieved popularity. He had enemies and critics; his anatomical drawings, which have never been surpassed, were not to popular taste, his system of classification severely criticised and this magnificent work barely survived one edition whereas the contemporary work, of identical title, by Yarrel, who know what the public wanted, went to four editions.

What is not generally known is that MacGillivray was a talented illustrator, but the coloured illustrations to his British Birds were never published owing to cost. Six (of birds) were reproduced for the first time in the Scottish Field in 1952. In the present volume we have a further 32 (of birds, fish and mammals) in addition to many reproductions of his engravings.

Although this reviewer has dwelt mainly on the ornithological content it is his opinion that every person who styles himself/herself a "Scottish Naturalist" should read and if possible possess this book.

The extensive bibliography demonstrates MacGillivray's prodigious output of scientific works and papers. In contrast to this only four works about MacGillivray are listed, but to these should be added Bayliss,R.A. 1983. The 1833 journey of William MacGillivray; Aberdeen University Review No 169, 46-58.

At first glance this slim volume may appear expensive, but it is a high quality production with 140 black and white illustrations and 32 full page coloured plates; after all we are now paying £30 for Collins New Naturalist hardbacks, so it is really a good buy at £25

Ian D Pennie

SOC Notice

Change of Recorders

Grampian area.

It is with regret that we note that Ken Shaw is no longer the SOC recorder for Grampian, and thank him for his many years of valuable service. It should however be noted that Andy Webb and Andy Thorpe have willingly agreed to take on this enormous task between them, and we wish them well with their new task. The addresses to which records should be sent are **Andy Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP, or Andy Webb, 4 Morningside Place, Aberdeen AB1 1XE.**

Argyll area.

It is also regretted that Mike Madders who has been the SOC recorder for Argyll for many years has unfortunately resigned due to pressures of work, but we would like to welcome his successor Dr Tristan ap Rheinallt who previously edited the Arran Bird Report to this post and wish him every success. **Tristan's address is:- 19 Shore Street, Port Wemyss, Isle of Islay PA47 7ST.**

THE SNOW BUNTING
by
DESMOND NETHERSOLE-THOMPSON

A facsimile reprint of this classic monograph of 1966, updated to 1976, and to the present day by D.B. Thompson and others. Price £27 post free. Orders and cheque to Peregrine Books, 27 Hunger Hills Avenue,. Horsforth, Leeds, LS18 5JS.

Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report 1992.

The Dumfries & Galloway bird report can be purchased from **J E Howie, 60 Main Street, St. John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW** at a cost of £2.40 including post and packing. Back numbers from 1985 are also available at reduced rates; please contact Joan for further details.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible.

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

This is the first year of a colour ringing study of Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus. I hope to continue this study for several years. This migratory thrush travels considerable distances in spring and autumn and any sightings of colour ringed birds, however incomplete, would be extremely useful.

The right leg carries a single colour ring donating year of ringing above or below the metal ring and a double combination the left leg.

Any correspondence will be acknowledged. **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PG Tel 0241 53356.**

Red Kites

As part of the JNCC/RSPB re-introduction programme with the RSPB North Scotland Office handling the Scottish side of things, would members please report any sightings of Red Kites to **RSPB North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel. 0463 715000** as soon as possible. Please do not think somebody else may have already reported your sighting: it is better to have more than one report of the same bird than none at all.

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past two years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100 birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.

Indications are that young birds move considerable distance and I would therefore be grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. Any correspondence will be acknowledged. **Andrew Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to the following people who willingly gave up their time at the end of August to come into the office and help pack the September issue of SBN, SBR and the many other bits of paper into their respective envelopes. Without the willing help of these people this would be an impossible task, and the fact that this mailing was all ready to go within 2 days was pretty good, and I thank the following. Margaret Abel, Bernard Brown, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, Hetty Harper, Margaret Mowat and Bob & Betty Smith.

Technical assistance with the desktop publishing system was provided by the combined efforts of Keith Chapman and Ray Murray.

Lothian Branch

Changes to SOC Lothian Branch meetings for **March and April 1994.**

The meeting on March 8th 1994 will now take place at St. Mary's Land Lecture Theatre, Holyrood Campus, Moray House Institute of Edinburgh at 7.30 and not at Napier College. The speaker is Mike Trubridge talking about In Search of the Slender Billed Curlew.

AGM & Members night in April has been changed from April 12th to April 5th but the venue is unchanged at Napier College, Craiglockhart, Colinton Road, Edinburgh.

200 CLUB

Winners in the third quarter of 1993 were:

July: 1st £30 - Miss D.Smith, Stirling; 2nd £20 - Mrs M.Kerrod, Bowden, Melrose; 3rd £10 - Mrs J D Watson, St.John's Town of Dalry.

August: 1st £30 - J F Young, Keir, Dumfries; 2nd £20 - Prof. N R Grist, Glasgow 3rd £10 - Dr M E Castle, Ayr.

September: 1st £30 - G C Sheppard, Stranraer; 2nd £20 - Mrs V M Tulloch, Isle of Gigha; 3rd £10 - R S Smith, Plymouth.

It was most encouraging to welcome some new members to the '200 Club' following the last issue of SBN. If you are new to the SOC and would like some more information about the 200 Club, please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, near Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. Tel 089682 2176

Colour-ringed Gulls.

A request has been received from Norman van Swelm of the Voorne Bird Observatory in the Netherlands asking birdwatchers in Britain to be on the look out for various gull species, some of which are carrying colour rings at present. Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Yellow-legged Gulls have been marked with either a single white, green or orange engraved PVC ring or a combination of two rings (one on each tarsus). Common Gulls are marked with a single green or black engraved PVC ring and Great Black-backed Gulls marked with a single green engraved PVC ring. Other projects in Latvia and the Ukraine also involve Yellow-legged Gulls; in Latvia these are a single black engraved PVC rings and in the Ukraine a single red engraved PVC ring.

Any sightings of any of these birds should be sent to **Norman van Swelm, Ornithologisch Station Voorne, Voorne Bird Observatory, P O Box 305, 3233 ZG Oostvoorne, The Netherlands.**

MISSING SLIDES

Chris Mylne has lost a box of slides after the conference at Aviemore. Could everybody please check to see if they have got them by mistake.
Contact Sylvia at the Office.
Thank you.

Look out for Goosanders!

On 21st August 1993 the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Mick Marquiss of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology managed to catch ring and wing tag 8 Goosanders on the Eden Estuary L.N.R.

This is the second year this catch has been attempted and in 1992, 22 Goosanders were tagged with blue tag and dark blue lettering, this year the tag is red with white lettering. Results so far from 1992 would indicate that these birds which moult on the Eden Estuary actually come from the south and west with reports from Dumfries & Galloway, the Peak District and even Wales.

If anyone has sightings of any of these birds please get in touch with **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ranger Service, Craigtoun Country Park, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX (Tel 0334 72151).**

All sightings will be acknowledged.

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